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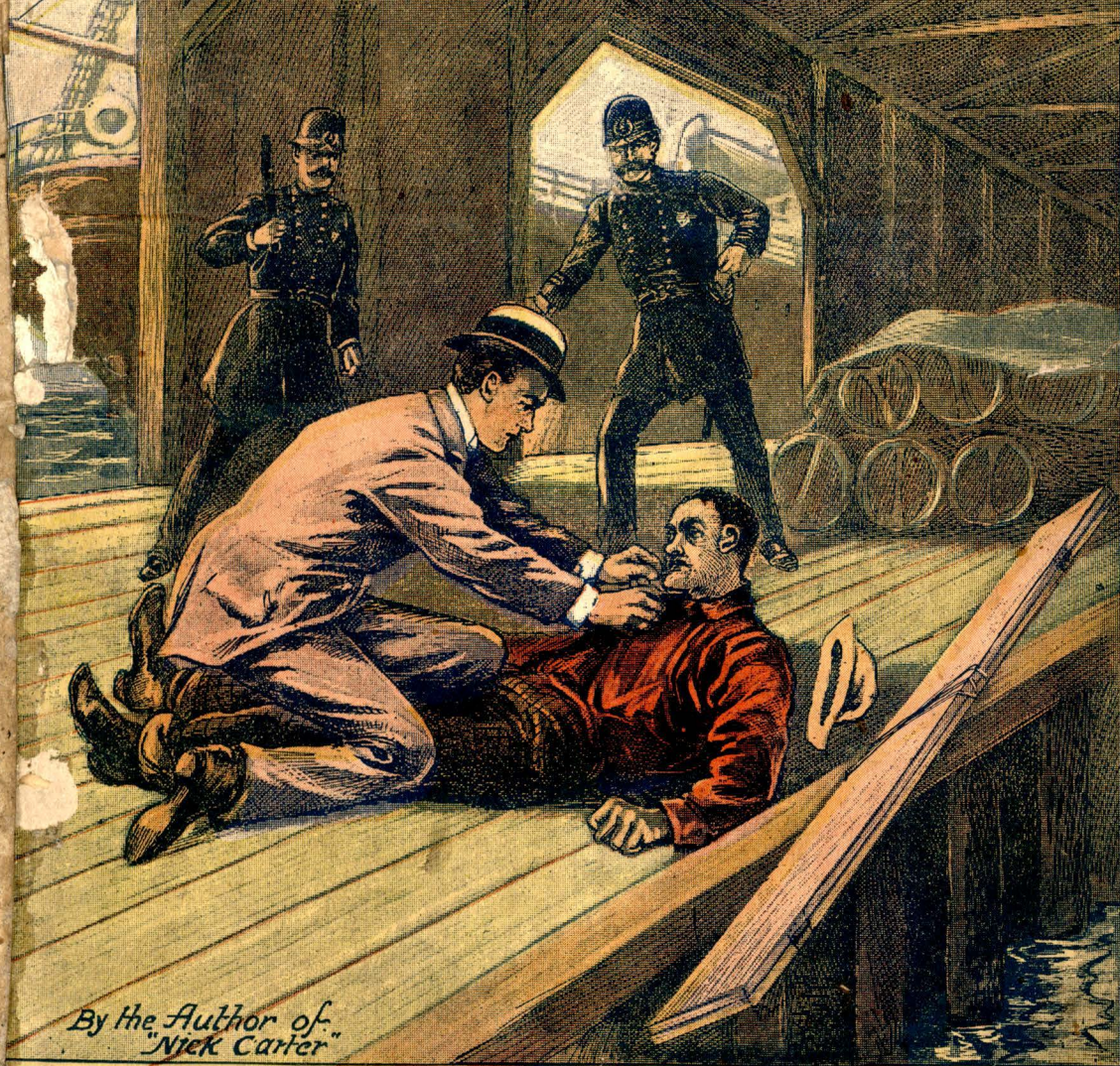
# NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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## NICK CARTER'S MISSING DETECTIVE OR A WARNING BY TELEPHONE



By the Author of  
"Nick Carter"

BUFF LANDED UPPERMOST AS BOTH FELL; GOT THE ADVANTAGE OF A STURDY GRIP AND HELD ON.



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## Nick Carter's Missing Detective; OR, A WARNING BY TELEPHONE.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

### CHAPTER I.

#### NICK CARTER'S TELEPHONE.

"Help!"

"What's that?"

"An echo."

"The sound from outside."

"Boys, I could take my oath that was Bob Ferret."

"Yes, and it came from the telephone."

Five voices uttered the sentences in quick succession, like the rapid hail of musketry.

Five boys—"Nick Carter's boys"—sprang to their feet as by a common impulse.

Sheltered and cozy they had been seated in the library of the great detective's home discussing the salient points of a talk Nick had given them that morning on detective science, when there had come a sudden and startling interruption.

Outside, New York was experiencing one of the worst storms of years.

Thunder was rolling, lightning was flashing, the rain beat against the windows as if thrown from buckets.

It was an eerie night—a night for dark deeds of crime, for mysterious disappearances, for uncanny occurrences generally.

A queer jangle had suddenly tanged through the room like that of a wire struck by a hammer.

It had been followed by a muffled yet sharply accentuated word—ominous, almost curdling.

That word seemed borne on the shrieking wings of the tempest—an echo from the lurking place of the footpad, the terror-cry of the victim of some quagmire trap.

"Help!"

Like a bombshell thrown into the midst of some placid family group, the utterance was the signal for immediate distraction.

Each member of the little coterie roused to vivid excitement, acting out the characteristics of a nature off guard.

Jack Burton, the detective pupil who was an all-around amateur athlete, and relied on good stout fists when his wits failed, assumed instantly the pose of a gladiator ready to jump into the arena.

Slow, thoughtful Aleck White became meditative. Discipline was his strong point, and he stood like a soldier awaiting orders.

Larry Moore, the mascot and hoodoo of



the school combined, because always blundering at the wrong time and yet invariably coming out right side up through some extraordinary luck, tumbled over a chair looking flustered, but eager to do something brilliant.

Buff Hutchinson, ex-king of the news-boys, acrobatic rough-and-tumble marvel, with wits sharp as a razor, eyes like an eagle, a heart that absolutely knew no fear—to whom Nick Carter was a hero, and detective service the highest attainable honor—fixed a devouring glance on the telephone as if it was an oracle.

The last member of the throng was Paul Elliott. Bob Ferret, the youngest but shrewdest pupil of the school, the star boy detective of New York, had saved Paul's life in Chicago, while downing plotters who had sought to secure his fortune, and Paul had become a stanch friend of Nick's favorite and a constant visitor to the school.

These were the five boys who, in a quiet corner of New York that wild, tempestuous night, were suddenly aroused to the most tremendous excitement by a mysterious cry coming in a mysterious way through Nick Carter's telephone.

Instantly Jack Burton sprang to the instrument, caught up the receiver, and propelled a sharp inquiry.

"Who is it?"

"Bob—hel-l-p!"

The startling appeal died down like a far away disappearing cry—a quiver seemed to cross the wire as if a rough hand jangled it.

"Hello!"

No response.

"Hello! hello! hello!"

Still no answer.

Jack's face was working with vivid excitement. Four startled pairs of eyes met his own as he turned.

"Switched off," he spoke, simply.

"It was Bob—Bob Ferret?" quavered Buff.

"It was certainly Bob."

"And he called 'Help?'"

"Yes."

"Boys, when Bob Ferret calls 'help,' it means something!"

"Something is up—what?" propounded Paul Elliott, sharply.

They looked into one another's faces

seeking a solution, a grand panoramic review of daring Bob Ferret's past exploits rushing through each mind, each thinker knew what to expect.

"Bob is in trouble," voiced Aleck definitely.

"Worse than that," declared Jack. "At a telephone, suddenly hushed up."

"A boy with the grit of a grindstone——" began Paul.

"And the go of a gun," put in Buff.

"Don't signal headquarters with a false alarm on such a night as this," added Jack. "On with your togs! This means sharp run."

"Where to?" propounded Aleck.

"That's so," muttered Jack, blankly. "Where to?"

"One minute!"

Quick-witted Paul Elliott brushed Jack aside from the telephone, and rang the bell vigorously.

"Central?"

"Yes."

"This is Nick Carter's. Party just cut our wire—want him again."

"Broke off. No—can't get him. Wire out of condition."

"It wasn't out of condition a second ago."

"Can't help that—it is now. May be the storm."

"Who was it—who? Four what? A Thanks. Good-by."

Paul dropped the receiver and made a dash for the directory.

He had got a number, he sought the address.

Like lightning his nimble fingers ran over the pages of the book, watched with suspenseful interest by his anxious companions.

"Got it?" inquired Jack, as Paul showed the book quickly.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Room twenty, Wayne Block."

"Off we go!" ordered Jack. "Not a word of you. Aleck, some one must stay here—let it be you and Larry."

"Make it us if you like," said Aleck.

"I shall be terribly anxious till we hear what's up," commented Paul, looking dreadfully disappointed at the idea of being left behind. He realized, however, that he was not an active member of the



panoramic pool, and in the haste and excitement of the moment Jack passed him over.

"Twenty, Wayne Block," memorized the latter, hurriedly. "Quick's the word this is a hurry call, Buff!" as he noticed the latter diving into a wardrobe.

Slam! the front door—down the steps dashed up. And out into the night like sprinting phantoms swept the prompt pair.

Slam! the door of a carriage—whirling hastily by in the lightning's flare, failed, loaded in a flash, and sent shooting head again with an address shouted out, and Jack's incisive order.

"Fly!"

"Know where we're going?" was yelled out of Jack as the vehicle tore across the echoing paving stones.

"Yes," nodded Buff. "Building off the bowery—tough district—regular nest of crime. It was Bob?"

"No mistake."

"What can have happened?"

"Can't guess."

"I can," declared Buff.

The ex-newsboy's eyes were burning with excitement and suspense. Bob in double meant the other daring half of himself in trouble, for in a late case where both had grazed some hair-breadth w. Maybescapes Buff had done his full share.

"Go ahead," directed Jack.

"Bob told me to-day that a friend had eat for him."

"On a case?"

"Bank case."

"Ah!"

"Didn't have time to talk—said he'd fingers rate home to-night and would certainly wantatched with help."

"He gave no hint?"

"Said it was the puzzler of his life, and Paul shute was groping till he got the rights of t—the cleverest game of crime he had ver read, heard or dreamed about."

"It makes me curious," admitted Jack.

"Not all I'm only anxious," sighed Buff. "I t stay here tell you, it isn't like Bob to waste any ime yelling that he's hurt, till he's got to he very last ditch."

"That's no dream," muttered Jack.

"He's started in on his bank case, what- ever it is, he's run up against something particularly hard to beat—but if he had me to get to a telephone—"

"He didn't have time to say his say," observed Buff, "and that's what worries me."

"Whoa!" from outside.

"Here we are."

"Now, then, we'll take our bearings before we rush into a trap," spoke Jack, sharply.

Deposited on the pavement, from the carriage across its slippery surface the two young detectives darted to the doorway of a rickety building.

Third-rate was written all over it, and it was nested in between a dance hall and a modest blinded structure that most brazenly thus advertised itself as a gambling resort.

Not a light was visible in the building except where its halls cut through into those adjoining.

It seemed given over, according to the signs below, to offices for fakirs' novelties, clairvoyants and the like, but as the boys ascended the stairs they guessed that not one room out of five was occupied.

"Third floor for twenty," directed Buff, scanning the numbers on the second.

"There's twenty," pointed Jack.

It was no wonder that both of them pressed forward precipitately and with anxiety—that room probably held beyond its portals either the key or the quietus to the mystery of Bob Ferret's fate.

"The door's open," whispered Buff, in a tremendous flutter.

"It's been a broker's office," spoke Jack. "No furniture."

"Vacant."

They had entered the apartment. Lights from buildings across a court, the reflection from street lamps, the almost incessant glare of the lightning enabled a pretty clear investigation of the place.

"Hello!" exclaimed Jack.

"What is it?" queried Buff, hurrying eagerly to Jack's side.

"Look."

"A telephone?"

"Busted. Why, it's been smashed out with a single blow, wires torn clear away, kindling wood. Here's the hatchet that did it."

"Down—back!" uttered Buff, sharply.

"Some one coming?"

"Yes."



There was an alcove with a washstand in a shadowed corner. Into it the boys crowded.

They had heard hurried though halting steps in the hall outside. These now approached.

A man came into view, and straight into the room where the boys crouched.

They noticed that his step was slightly limping as he looked all about the floor near the telephone. They saw him pick up some cloth object.

"Jack," whispered Buff, positively, "it's Bob's cap."

"Are you sure?"

"Dead certain. The man's picking up a little wad of paper, too—removing traces. He's going. I'll take that."

Buff had no orders, he simply acted on impulse. In a swinging jump he was fairly upon the intruder.

He wrested cap and paper fragment from the grasp of the astonished fellow.

The latter uttered a startled cry and made a run for the door.

Buff grabbed at him, missed, and stumbled flat as the man, reaching the threshold, gave the door a pull shut.

He was nearly out in the hall, but in some way one leg got caught between the door and its jamb.

That limb Buff grabbed, holding on with the tenacity of a vise.

The man wriggled, squirmed. Buff's fingers clinched his foot like set pincers.

"Quick, Jack, quick!" he spoke. "He's drawing a weapon. Tear open the door—get him down. My stars!"

Bumpetty-bump—tugging at the foot to prevent its owner from slipping away, back went Buff all of a sudden.

The door went slam shut. There must have been a key in it, for it was locked, too.

Buff looked at the spot where the man had been and now was not.

He stared at that part of him that he had left behind.

Never more startled in his life, Buff realized that his active antagonist had "come apart."

His leg had come off!

With a queer kind of a thrill Buff stared at it vaguely.

"He's slipped us, Jack!" he gasped,

quickly—"he's slipped us by leaving friend behind him his cork leg!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CORK LEG.

Bang-bang!

Immediately through the door passed came two crashing bullets.

Buff sprang to his feet and dodged of range. His companion crowded close the alcove.

"He's a hot one!" muttered Jack. "What you got?" for Buff had held off the queer personal belonging left behind by the late intruder.

"His cork leg."

"Never!"

"Isn't it—just. Listen to that!"

A perfect babel of whistles and shouts rang out beyond the door.

"He's signaling some one."

"We must get out of this room," declared Jack.

"You see—Bob has been here."

"Of course he has. Is that his? Yes. And the little wad of paper?"

"Looks like a crumpled card. No time to look at it now."

"We're in for it!" reported Jack.

He had run to the two windows of room and then to a side door, and he was now running back to the alcove.

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"Windows barred the whole length."

"And the door?"

"Bolted on the other side, I guess. Anyway, solid as rock. Some one else coming. Hear that!"

The listened intently. A new voice spoke out. It hailed the man who had lost his leg.

"What's up, Tyrell?"

"Two in there."

"Two what?"

"Spies, meddlers—got my leg."

"Eh?"

"You know who number one was?"

"Ferret."

"One of Carter's best."

"Well, he's caged safe enough."

"With two more of the same kind after us! I tell you, Wolcott, they're there, I tell you they've got my leg! Let it go or get nabbed."

"That deuced telephone!"

"Yes, number one got a message."



s by leaving friends, sure. We were not in time, it  
ms, to prevent him. Who knows how  
ch they know—what he's told them?"

II. "We've got to cut for it, then."

LEG. "Can't."

"Why not?"

"They've settled it."

the door pa "Settled what?"

and dodged A whispered word was spoken. A dis-  
crowded clos- concerted shout rang from the lips of the  
it comer.

muttered Ja "What!" he cried, in an excess of pro-  
nd dismay. "What!"

f had held o "Yes, it was in my cork leg for safe  
ying left bel- eping."

"What's that?" muttered Buff, prick-  
g up his ears sharply.

"It," something, was in the cork leg.  
own into the hollow of the false limb  
ff's quick fingers groped.

"Anything there?" whispered Jack,  
gerly.

"Yes—can't make out what it is. See,  
package big as your fist. Feels soft,  
te paper. Jack, we've bagged something  
important. Hear the new fellow rave  
out it! Take care."

They heard the knob of the door grind  
ard. The new-comer had jumped upon

The transom over the door was pushed  
odily out, and fell to the floor, crashing  
ass and frame.

A weird, probing arm came in, fired at  
ip-hazard twice, drew out, and its owner  
opped to the hallway with a slam of  
th feet.

"Unlock that door!" he ordered his  
ompanion.

"But——"

"They're caged, aren't they? They're  
ot armed. If they were, they would fire  
ack."

"We'll have the force down on us with  
l this noise!"

"In this howling storm—in this empty  
ilding? Unlock the door, I say. It's  
vo more to cage, it's that to get back, if  
e have to wade through blood to get it!"

"Whatever we came here for without  
eing armed, I don't know," muttered

"You hurried me so, I never thought of  
," explained Buff.

There was a noisy fumbling at the  
a messageck.

"Let us make a bold run," suggested  
Buff.

"What for?"

"That side door. Both together—slam  
against it with all your force. One, two,  
three—go!"

It was "go!" for both boys and door.  
The door was bolted on the other side,  
but the massed human catapult took it by  
storm.

In it went, off its top hinges, and  
across its tilting surface the two friends  
slid, landing in a heap on the floor be-  
yond.

Buff had dropped the cork leg. The  
package it contained, however, he stowed  
in his pocket.

The glare of a light across the court  
illuminated the apartment so they could  
see that it was finished as a bed chamber,  
but it held no occupant.

Buff's sharp eyes scanned every object  
in the room. He found no weapon, but  
he did find a missile, a dozen of them.

Upon the wall were two wire cases  
filled with fire-extinguishing hand gren-  
ades.

As Buff heard the door in the other  
room pushed violently open, he jerked  
loose one of the grenade cases and sta-  
tioned himself at the door they had just  
broken down.

"Jack," he spoke, sharply, "try the  
door behind us."

"Yes. There's a key in it."

"No, no—don't unlock it. That is, not  
just yet. I have a plan."

"What is it?"

Crash!

Buff had to interrupt himself. Just as a  
form crossed the hall threshold of the  
next room, he let drive one of the gren-  
ades.

It struck the edge of the door. There  
was a resounding pop and a fearful splin-  
tering of glass.

The man who was about to pounce in,  
as he supposed, on two unarmed boys,  
dodged back into the hall with a cry of  
mingled dismay and pain.

"I'll guard here," pronounced Buff,  
coolly. "Come up to me, Jack. I've got  
to keep the enemy in view. Feel in my  
left inside pocket."

"Left it is."

"Package I got from the cork leg."



"Yes."

"Take it out."

"Got it," reported Jack.

"Stow it safe. Now then, run to the bed."

"I say——"

"Jack, if you delay it may mean everything. For once let me have my way."

"A good way thus far, so I'm all here for orders!"

"Is there a mattress on the bed? Wait a minute."

Crash!"

The man in the hall had poked in his head again and fired, having discovered by this time where the fugitives were lodged.

"All right," tranquilly resumed Buff.

"He's gone back for repairs again."

"There's a thick hair mattress on the bed."

"Off with it."

"If I only knew."

"Do as I say. Can you hold it in front of you?"

"Lift it and walk, you mean?"

"Just that."

"Yes, see?"

"Unlock the door, hold the mattress as a shield. Get across the hall to the stairs, and slide down those banisters for the street as if your life depended on it."

"See here, Buff——"

"No, see there. That packet may be the all-important clue in this case. We can't risk that. Get it safely somewhere—that's the vital point just now."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll hold the fort till you get help. Go. Throw back the door. March out."

Bang-bang!

The minute the moving mattress shield came into view, two revolvers blazed at it from the door not thirty feet distant.

Crash-crash!

As the two shooters hurried eagerly forward—the crippled fellow by hugging the wall on his dismantled side, Buff let drive those terrible glass balls once more.

One of them struck one of the men squarely in the forehead. Amid a deluge of chemicals and glass splinters he went backward whirling and spluttering.

### CHAPTER III.

#### "THE LONG GREEN."

"Good!" voiced Buff, exultantly. Jack had crossed the hall in safety, dropped the mattress. Then Buff saw slide the bannisters in a flash, and that he and the package from the leg was safe.

He poised the last of the grenades had in hand as he saw the cripple his weapon.

Buff took a good aim, but it abruptly distracted. The cripple free bullet struck the grenade.

"Phew!" choked Buff, half blip wholly rattled, and he staggered back to the room and shut and locked the

He planned to instantly secure a supply of the grenades and hold the enemy at bay till Jack returned with but this opportunity was not afforded

The door he had locked went suddenly open with a crash, and at it stood the legged man, while at the one he and had forced, the other man as suddenly appeared.

"After me hot and heavy!" muttered Buff, grimly.

He dared not risk making for a cage of the grenades. Putting for shelter behind the bedstead head, a bullet started its top board.

"The window!"

Buff for the first time discovered the was not barred. Was it locked? No, he gave the catch a lift, the sash a slide ward.

He was out on the sill in a jiffy. Tetter he balanced himself, with a gruesome downward glance.

"Blocked!" he breathed, desperately. "It's forty feet if an inch."

The last comer in the hall was dancing toward him, intent on seizing him.

Just then a vivid flash of light showed, wet and glaring, in a wall aloft not two feet away a large water pipe.

Buff made a leap for it. His hand clutched about the old water carrier firmly. He got ready to slide downward.

"I've done it!" uttered Buff, in feverish alarm, a second later.

A section of the pipe had come loose. He dropped with it, being slammed against a lower section ten feet down.

Fortunately, the stout metal only bent



III. swayed for a moment as on a swing-  
 GREEN." inge, caught at the portion of the  
 exultantly. still intact, and reached the ground  
 all in safety. hands pretty badly cut up.  
 when Buff saw "aged!"  
 flash, and he word surged to his lips with no lit-  
 ge from the ismay as he took a scurry and a keen  
 ce around the place.  
 the grenad Buff found himself in a blind court.  
 the cripple y single lower window was covered  
 screen wire the thickness of his  
 im, but it r.  
 e cripple fire he next story windows he might reach  
 e. some vigorous climbing, but the last  
 ff, half blind of these was provided with bars.  
 aggered back he third story windows of the build-  
 locked the across the court were a blaze of light,  
 tly secure at the sound of clinking glasses and gay  
 and hold the told that a riotous crowd was with-  
 igned with and these sounds would drown out any  
 not afforded ide cry amid the fierce battling of the  
 ed went sudd ents.  
 it stood the I'm pinned in like a rat in a trap,"  
 one he and tered Buff. "They've began."  
 man as sudd fusilade instantly started in. Desper-  
 heavy!" mutt they began peppering away at Buff as  
 s life was no more to them than that  
 fly.  
 king for and uff's only chance of safety seemed to  
 utting for sh in keeping in constant motion.  
 , a bullet s he dodged, ducked and dove, and then  
 ping across one of the slate slabs with  
 discovered th ch the court was paved, made a dis-  
 icked? No. ry, and proceeded to utilize it.  
 sash a slide he slab rocked; it was loose. It was  
 , and easily lifted.  
 in a jiffy. T etting a purchase, Buff wedged its  
 th a grues ing side directly toward the upper  
 dows, held it on a safe incline with  
 ed, desperat strong shoulder, and soliloquized tran-  
 ly.  
 hall was dar Now then, fire—you can't hit me if  
 izing him. try. Hello! Gone. Coming down  
 sh of light after me? No. Some one else?  
 in a wall alo!"  
 water pipe. Only two bullets pattered on the side of  
 His hand cl's unique fortress.  
 carrier fir here followed some vivid ejaculations,  
 ward. window held up came down with a  
 Buff, in fern. Peering cautiously and recognizing  
 orm at the other, Buff called up a  
 had come lock hail.  
 being slam Buff?" came the eager challenging re-  
 n feet down, use in Jack's quick voice.  
 metal only b Yes—those fellows? Just left."

"The police are after them. Come up."

"Throw me a lifeline."

Buff ran up the basement wire screen like a born gymnast, and clutched the first story window sill, but at the top of its barred window frame he halted perforce.

Jack lowered a sheet, and his spry comrade shortly stood by his side.

They put out promptly into the hall. Three police officers, looking in their dripping rain coats as if they were mailed, were darting hither and thither, opening doors, peering into rooms, flashing dark lanterns into all coal bins, scurrying from corridor to corridor. A man wearing a roundsman's uniform came abruptly through one of the arches cut into the next building.

"You've lost your game," he announced to Jack.

"That so?" murmured the latter, disappointedly.

"Seems it. I suppose you know that this building has been the favorite many-exit place for all kinds of sharpers for a long time?"

"I didn't know it, but I see it's an excellent place for a confidence man to leave a victim at the bottom of the street entrance, to wait till he runs up stairs to 'cash a check.'"

"And he'd wait till doomsday, exactly. The lay of the land is just this: Those fellows might run to a dozen coverts. It's a labyrinth, the next building. I've heard there's tunnels between some of the gambling places, saloons, thieves' boozing dens and the like that mostly take up this square."

"And our men are thoroughly familiar with the territory?"

"Oh! that, sure."

"Then we know where to look for them later. Come on, Buff."

"Going to give up the search?" objected Buff.

"Do you think it good policy to penetrate a spot where those fellows would recognize us at once, without preparation?"

"Oh, you're coming back?"

"Slightly!"

Jack had told the officers he had summoned who he was.

He thanked them now, got to the curb



with Buff, and both were soon whirling homeward in the carriage.

"Bob?" was the first inquiry of his three anxious friends, as the boys entered Nick Carter's library just one hour after they had left it.

"We haven't found Bob, but we're going to," reported Buff.

"Yes," nodded Jack, "we're forced to take things in their order. We've found Bob's cap, we know who nabbed him—a fellow with a cork leg——"

"Named Tyrell," put in Buff.

"We have probably, further," continued Jack, "got hold of something that Bob was after—an important clue to his proceedings. What you got, Buff?"

"Oh! the little wad of paper? Here it is."

Bob produced and opened a crumpled piece of thin pasteboard.

"Egbert Wadhams, assistant paying teller, Traders' Mercantile Bank," he read. "I'll bet Bob dropped that."

"We've struck his starter, that's sure," declared Jack, convincingly.

"What's in the package I gave you?" inquired Buff in turn.

"Found in the cork leg? Here it is."

Jack brought to light a parcel done up smoothly in a small silk handkerchief.

It was knotted at the corners. A curious, eager group circled him as he laid back flap after flap of the covering.

"The long green!" remarked Larry, who liked always to be "technical."

"Treasury notes!" spoke Paul Elliott, peering interestedly.

"Whew! look at that!" uttered Jack, spinning the crisp corners of the pile—"every one on a hundred-dollar note, and there must be fully two hundred of them. Buff, here's a find on your life!"

"Say!"

Buff grabbed up the package without ceremony.

"Look there!" he cried, turning it around.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Jack, violently. "Why, they're only half bills!"

"Yes," nodded Buff, significantly—"every bank note in that heap has been cut squarely in two!"

## CHAPTER V.

### FADED OUT.

"Go!"

Jack Burton, in the absence of Nick Carter, was the accredited leader of a veteran thief-catcher's detective school.

One directing word, therefore, was enough to urge Buff Hutchinson needed to urge ed once more out into the wild night, to explore the clues in hand that appertained to Bob Ferret's mysterious disappearance and the cork leg's equally mysterious session of a great roll of United States Treasury bank notes cut squarely in two.

There were two hundred of them, crisp, genuine, and they were severed smoothly as if cut in two by a keen-edged razor.

Nick Carter's pupils were not the boys to let a hot trail grow cold under promising conditions of the present exciting case.

No time was lost in conjecture—square vital facts confronted them, and in order to get started right it was necessary an immediate visit should be made to the address on the card Bob Ferret had probably purposely dropped.

Jack reflected only for a minute to be sure, he was proceeding exactly right.

Then he consulted the directory, got the residence address of the assistant paying teller of the Traders' Mercantile Bank.

Writing this upon the card, he handed it to Buff with a direction to return to the carriage and visit and interview Egbert Wadhams at once.

"And you fellows?" interrogated Buff.

"We shall put after the man with the cork leg."

Buff's eyes sapped thoughtfully as he rocked from side to side in the rapid-dashing vehicle that left Nick Carter's door a minute later.

"One thing to find out," he soliloquized, briefly.

"What the bank teller knows about these cut in two bills—two things make for: Bob Ferret and the other half of the notes."

A halting jolt roused Buff out of his reverie. They had arrived at the address on the card.

Buff ran up the steps and rang the door bell. A servant answered its summons.



Mr. Wadhams was at home. She led  
 down the hall, rapped at a door,  
 opened it, and Nick Carter's detective  
 found himself in the presence of a  
 man pacing the floor nervously.

"Here was a worried, gloomy challenge  
 before, with his tired eyes as he questioningly sur-  
 veyed his visitor.

"Are you Mr. Egbert Wadhams, teller  
 of the Traders' Bank?" inquired Buff,  
 disappearing promptly.

"I was," answered the man with a sigh  
 "until yesterday."

"Oh!" muttered Buff, understandingly,  
 and then he plunged at once into his sub-  
 ject. "Mr. Wadhams, I am from Nick  
 Carter's. One of his pupils sent in a mys-  
 terious call for help two hours ago. We  
 followed it up, to find in a room where he  
 had evidently been overpowered, your  
 present ex-"

"It was Ferret!" projected the bank  
 teller, eagerly.

"It was Bob Ferret."

"Yes, he was working on my case. I  
 have known him for years. I sent for him  
 yesterday and told him my trouble."

"Mr. Wadhams, what is your trouble?"

"And now he is in trouble, danger,  
 perhaps—too bad!"

"Never mind that. We'll drag him out  
 of it, don't fear," declared Buff, stanchly.

"If you want to help us, throw all the  
 light you can on what Bob was after."

Buff's brisk, promising manner aroused  
 Wadhams instantly.

"You're business from the start," he  
 commended, admiringly. "In a nutshell,

when I yesterday paid out at the bank  
 twenty thousand dollars for which I am  
 unable to find no voucher."

"In one hundred-dollar new treasury  
 notes?" insinuated Buff.

"Hello! how do you know that? Oh!  
 Ferret told you, of course."

"Not at all, but I'll tell you later.  
 Please proceed, Mr. Wadhams," urged  
 Buff.

"I am willing to swear," continued the  
 bank teller, "that a check for that

amount was paid by me at eleven o'clock  
 yesterday morning, bearing the signature

of a person we know very little about,  
 but who deposited twenty thousand dol-  
 lars a month ago. His name is Percy

Wolcott."

"Eh?" ejaculated Buff, with a start,  
 mentally recalling the name he had heard  
 applied by the man with the cork leg to  
 his companion. "Name familiar, that's  
 all," he explained to the teller, checking  
 any further appearance of surprise.

"The check bearing Wolcott's signa-  
 ture was presented by a man who slightly  
 halted in his gait."

"The cripple, Tyrell," murmured Buff.  
 "This is getting easy."

"I paid the check, as you say, in one  
 hundred-dollar bills. At two o'clock I  
 went out for my lunch. When I returned  
 I noted a check just paid by my substitute  
 for another twenty thousand dollars to  
 this same Percy Wolcott. He had applied  
 personally, and had drawn it."

"Why—how——" began Buff.

"There's the mystery. I hurried to the  
 second teller. I told him he had made a  
 fearful mistake. He said he guessed not—  
 the ledger showed twenty thousand dollars to  
 Wolcott's credit, a run over the day's  
 checks showed nothing drawn since the  
 morning's balancing. I ran them over  
 myself."

"And the first check was missing?"  
 guessed Buff, hap-hazard.

"Not at all."

"Then——"

"There it is."

The teller took up from the table before  
 him a strip of paper.

"A blank check on your bank," mur-  
 mured Buff.

"It wasn't blank when I paid it."

"I don't understand——"

"Do you see a pencil mark on the mar-  
 gin?"

"Yes, 'eighty-seven.'"

"Young man, I placed that there when  
 I paid it. I am prepared to swear to you,  
 as I declared to the bank officials who  
 have suspended me pending an investiga-  
 tion, as I told Bob Ferret, and as he  
 firmly believes, that the check now blank,  
 at eleven o'clock yesterday morning,  
 when I paid it, was filled out in the hand-  
 writing and signature of Percy Wolcott."

"Incredible!" ejaculated Buff.

"No. It was a clever game—the clever-  
 est, the most untraceable, the most un-  
 punishable, Ferret puts it, he ever heard  
 of. Wolcott knew, when he planned to  
 get forty thousand dollars for twenty



thousand, that the ink on the first check would fade out before one o'clock."

"Fade out!" cried the startled Buff. "Mr. Wadhams, I have heard of invisible writing that under the development of fire comes out clear, of so-called sympathetic ink that changes color under a chemical test, but of ink that shows up black, clear, perfect one hour, and leaves no trace the next——"

"Absolutely not!" half groaned the teller. "The strongest magnifying glass fails to show the slightest abrasion of the fibre of the paper. No, these clever men have discovered a new combination in chemicals that does just what has been done here."

"Clever, indeed," murmured Buff.

"Ferret says they have a power in their grasp that will enable them to commit the most glaring forgeries and defy the presentation of a single proof. He says that to run them down, to capture their device, would be to save the commercial world from one of the most dangerous menaces it has ever known."

"Whew!" half whistled the astounded Buff. "Bob was right when he said he had struck a puzzler."

"Ferret went at once to Wolcott's hotel. The man was gone, traps and everything."

"And that is all?" questioned Buff.

"Except that I have been counting the minutes till I should hear from my young detective friend, and now you tell me he has run into some unknown peril in my behalf——"

"Don't look so serious, Mr. Wadhams. If running into peril, as you call it, was not necessary, there would be no such thing as detectives. I have a question to ask."

"Yes?"

"Do you think that is the money you paid out on Wolcott's first check?"

Buff here produced the package he had found in the cork leg.

"The same, the very same, I am positive! Why, what is this? The bills are cut in two!"

"As you see."

"Only half of them are here!"

"Yes."

The perplexing discovery dazed the

bank teller as if he had been dealt a sudden blow.

Buff instantly related every detail of the case up to date.

"My friend," voiced the teller, disbelievingly, almost pleadingly, "my position, my honor, the little home I possess, my family's welfare, all—all depends on my recovering the other half of those av notes!"

"That's what we're helping Buff reach," observed Buff.

"Those alone are worthless, unredemable. If you can find the rest of them, oh, if you only can!"

"The outlook is clear, that's one satisfaction," remarked Buff. "We know the men. It is true that with that blank check you have not an iota of proof against them, but we shall nail them."

"I fervently hope so. Their wonder at fading ink——"

"Is not half as much of a mystery as the other thing," said Buff.

"And that is?"

"Why those treasury notes were cut in two."

## CHAPTER V.

### HAWK EYE BILL.

Buff went back to Nick Carter's home with the complete "rights of the cash on hand" very clearly settled in his mind, to his own way of thinking.

There was deft and delicate work ahead. There were points in the affair that strongly appealed to his keen professional instinct, outside of anxiety for his missing friend, Bob Ferret.

Except for this abduction phase of the matter, not even the police had a right to disturb Wolcott and his one-limbed accomplice.

There was no proof in existence. Wolcott had drawn more than what he longed to him, and until his actual confession of a fading out ink was settled by jury, like the bank, would be very skeptical of the teller's remarkable claim.

"It's getting next to those two men, Wolcott and Tyrell, that is the first view in view," planned Buff—"it's getting next to them and keeping next to them for a spell, and how am I going to do it?"

For, arriving at Nick's home,



been dealt a that Jack, taking Paul Elliott and with him, had returned to the scene every detail of stirring events of the earlier even- to reconnoitre.

teller, dis- "All right," nodded Buff to Aleck, "my posi- had been left on watch duty. "I'll e I possess across them there, or I'll be back depends on by the time they return. Mr. Carter of those away?"

Hasn't got back yet." "Wish I could see him. I fancy he'd to look at the case we've stumbled before any of us get it tangled up." "I'm afraid there'll be some tangling," asserted Aleck.

at's one s Why?" "We know Oh, Larry is out with one of his bril- at blank et theories about disguising himself proof of age boldly penetrating the lion's lair, as n." "alls it, and Paul is so anxious about their wonde, that he told Jack to spend a thou- dollars, if it will do any good."

a myster The rain had let up, and Buff took his on foot in the direction of the Bow- haunt where the cork leg had been tes were nd.

That article Jack had taken home with n. It's owner's deprivation, Buff real- d, might work to their benefit before night was through.

L. L. "There's something deeper probably in arter's ho case than the bank haul," ruminated f the case in his ex-newsboy. "Those bank notes were king. in two for some important reason. work al- other thing, they never grabbed Bob affair t- tried to knock us out so diligently professio- less they feared a spy on schemes they anxiety ve in view. They can walk the street t. enly for the one they have just played hase of they wanted to. No, Bob is on to some- d a right- bigger than the twenty thousand e-limbed alars, big as that is, the cut bills busi- s looks peculiar, and we haven't by stence tly means got into the real solid rock n what bits of this case yet, much as we've actual pen lucky in finding out in the last three s settled ours."

very ske Buff reached the vicinity of Wayne claim. lock. He walked all around the square e two several times.

first wo After a quarter of an hour's inspection, 's getti- could have made a map of the place et to them memory.

ing to wo "Funny I haven't run across Jack and e crowd," he soliloquized. "Maybe come, B-ey've gone back home. That's the

likely point for the two fellows I'm after," continued Buff, as he observed the entrance to the blinded rooms of the gam- bling house, for this building was con- nected by an archway with the build- ing where he had captured the cork leg.

There was a drug store opposite to it, and Buff entered this, took a seat near its window, and scanned the building across the street narrowly and thoughtfully.

Out of it suddenly came a slouching figure. It was that of a young fellow of perhaps twenty-two, and about Buff's own height.

He took many a furtive and undecided look up and down the street before he ventured past the threshold.

Bob spotted the fellow in an instant. He was, without doubt, some criminal taking advantage of darkness to steal from his usual hiding-place.

"Disguised, too," muttered Buff, read- ing the lurker as he would an open book.

The latter wore dark glasses, his slouch hat was two sizes too big for him, and pasted on each cheek was a patch of false whisk- that to Buff's keen eyes looked simply ridiculous.

"I'll follow him up," determined Buff. "When he gets at a little distance, I'll play the pal racket—dreadfully anxious to get somewhere under cover—and ques- tion him about the haunt he's just left."

Starting to put this plan into execu- tion, Bob was compelled to change his tactics.

After scanning the street once more very thoroughly, the fellow shot squarely across it. He came into the drug store as if he had run some kind of a gauntlet.

"Well!" muttered the attentive Buff. "Now, what's he after?"

"Say, felly!"

The new customer was a typical low- down tough in actions and voice, and the drug clerk whom he hailed with tone, blink and shoulder hunch combined, looked him over suspiciously.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"I want a leg, see?"

"You want what?"

"A kicker, a waltzer, from the knee down. Money no objects. A friend's got run over with a trolley, see? Lost half one stumper."

"Oh! you want an artificial limb?"



"That's it," proceeded the customer, volubly. "Paper, board or cork, says my friend, provided it fits out."

"We do not keep any surgical supplies."

"No?"

"No."

The customer scratched his frowzy head dubiously.

"I suppose I couldn't get one anywhere near you know of?" he interrogated.

"Why, yes, I do—Slade & Hemphill."

"Is that far?"

"Just two squares down the street."

The customer made a wry grimace, as if for some personal reason a public appearance along that distance meant the risk of his life.

"Couldn't—couldn't you send for it?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Boy away—alone in the store. It's only a step."

The customer took many a look down the street before he ventured on his errand.

He finally started ahead as if he was going to a fire, and Buff had to go some tall walking to keep him in sight.

For Buff had started up as if electrified the instant the fellow had made his peculiar wants known.

"After a false leg?" he soliloquized. "It's easy to guess who it's for. Scared to death to show his nose for fear of being nabbed. Here's a rare layout of luck, but how am I going to utilize it to my own advantage? Hello!"

Buff stared.

Just as the fellow ahead of him passed a dark doorway, out stepped a slim, spruce fellow right on his trail.

He lifted his hand with a quick gesture, as from a like covert across the street a second brisk individual started into view, keeping pace with his signaller, the width of the street between them.

"What's this, now?" muttered Buff.

The fellow after the artificial limb bolted into the drug store he had been directed to.

Then the two men who had shadowed him met in front of it, exchanged some quick words, and glided one each alongside the shadow of its two large doorposts.

"Detectives," guessed the interested

Buff. "That's what—and how will it affect my plans."

Buff loitered slowly up to the store and stood at the curb as if waiting for a car.

"It's coming to a focus," he declared half-turning as he saw the fellow in the gambling place start for the door.

He had a wrapped-up bundle under his arm, and Buff knew he had found purchased what he had been sent after.

He halted as was his wont, on drugstore threshold, and thrust out head to take the customary view.

"Good-evening, Hawkeye Bill!"

"Why! if it isn't our old safe bore!"

Each taking an arm of the astonished fellow, the two detectives marched down the steps.

"Gentlemen," demurred the crestfallen creature, "there's a mistake."

"Of course there is!" jibed the man in his right arm. "You should have waited an hour longer before venturing out, then we began to imagine the fellow whoed us onto your being in the city, then I guessed wrong in thinking you was at Maxey's den yonder."

"Say! who did? say! give me the name——" began Bill, obstreperously. "You won't?"

"Not professional, Bill."

"Then what's the record against this time?"

"That Long Island till sneak."

"I throw up both hands, as its life for medicine, not more than two years."

"What you got here, Bill?" inquired one of the officers, touching the artificial limb under the burglar's arm.

"It's not professional to state, gentlemen!" chuckled Bill.

"I'll tell you."

The detectives were leading Hawkeye Bill to the nearest police station, and he had been followed closely by Buff, who had overheard every word of their conversation.

"You'll tell us!" ejaculated one of them, turning sharply and scanning Buff with suspicion. "Who are you?"

"Yes, who are you?" demanded his companion, releasing the prisoner's arm, gliding back, and firmly seizing that Buff. "A pal, eh?"



and how will step back a little, and I'll tell you,"  
 ered Buff.  
 p to the drew his captor to one side. Buff  
 rb as if wait only to whisper a magic name in the  
 " he declar tive's ear to instantly have his  
 he fellow ad then, pointing to the crestfallen  
 or the door. keye Bill, Buff outlined a scheme  
 ndle under would have done entire credit to  
 had found Carter himself.  
 been sent

wont, on  
 thrust out  
 view. here were two things that Buff could  
 e Bill!" to perfection; make up to represent  
 safe bore character and mimic like a ventrilo-  
 he astonist.

marched he simply told the city detective that  
 as to Nick Carter's interest in a case  
 the crestfal yet ripe for public attention that he  
 "ld take up Hawkeye Bill's career  
 ed the man re the young burglar had laid it  
 d have wait n, to receive his hearty co-operation.  
 uring out, n twenty minutes after he had been  
 low who ped in a cell, Bill wore Buff's clothes,  
 he city, l the latter tried to feel the character  
 you was had resolved to act under what might  
 n out to be peculiarly risky circum-  
 give me ces.

ostreperous Bill was loyal to his friends. He must  
 e a had a suspicion as to the imposi-  
 fected, for no amount of persua-  
 d against could induce him to tell anything  
 nt the haunt he had just left nor his  
 eak." tions with the person who had sent  
 as its lig for the cork leg.

years." "It's a blind break," said one of the  
 ?" inquir ectives to Buff.

the artific I know it is, but I've got to get to  
 man this cork leg is intended for,"  
 state, gent lared Buff.

"Say," observed the other officer,  
 ou'll be taken in for the real Bill, if  
 ng Hawkey of our precinct men run across you."  
 on, and h "Made up well?"  
 ff, who h "Famous!"

their convers "Have I got the voice down fine:  
 ty, fellies, I'm innocent. See?"

ated one The appreciative laughter of the two  
 anning Bu ectives satisfied Buff that he had  
 ou?" ight Hawkeye Bill's accent and man-  
 manded H isms completely.

oner's arr Buff went back to the vicinity of the  
 ng that mb ling place preparing himself for all  
 ssible tests of his genuineness that

might be made, by guessing out what  
 snags might lay in his course.

He went up the narrow stairway down  
 which Hawkeye Bill had come an hour  
 previous with a bold swagger, and  
 knocked at the door at the top.

"What's the word?" came promptly  
 with the shooting back of the wicket.

"Word, nothing:" growled Buff.  
 "This'll do for a passport, I guess."

"What will?"

"Tyrell's leg. Didn't he send me out  
 after it, I'd like to know! Keep a fellow  
 here all night! That's right! Get me  
 jugged. Mighty nigh it, running all over  
 the city."

The door opened like magic.

Buff had made an audacious break, but  
 it settled the fact in his mind that Tyrell  
 was a power in the establishment.

He found himself in a little anteroom.  
 Beyond a curtained doorway he could  
 make out card tables, and the click of  
 ivory chips told that games were in active  
 progress.

"Where's Tyrell?" demanded Buff,  
 coolly.

"Where you left him, of course, in  
 that room, and piping hot crutching it,  
 when there's some fresh birds to pick in  
 yonder."

"In yonder" was of course the main  
 gambling apartment, and as there was  
 only one other door visible, Buff decided  
 that it must open into "that room."

"Well, you're a good one, I don't  
 think!" hailed him the minute he crossed  
 the threshold of an apartment where two  
 a men sat.

Buff braced up, for he knew both in a  
 flash. One was the cripple whom he had  
 divested of his cork leg, the other his  
 companion in the onslaught on the room  
 with the telephone in it—Wolcott.

"Couldn't help it," growled Buff,  
 slouching up and handing over the pack-  
 age he had taken from Hawkeye Bill.

"Couldn't help it!" snapped Tyrell,  
 irritably. "Does it take an hour to go  
 across the street."

"They didn't keep any legs across the  
 street. I had to go farther."

"How much was it?"

This was a stumper! Buff was in a  
 quandary. This phase of the case had  
 not presented itself to him before.



At the station Hawkeye Bill's money, jewelry, and other personal belongings had been taken in charge by the lock-up keepers.

"All you gave me," blurted out Buff desperately.

"What!" fairly shouted the incredulous Tyrell—"seventy-five dollars for a cheap, papier-mache contrivance that don't half fit and looks second-hand! See here——"

"Oh, let it go," luckily broke in Wolcott just here. "I suppose the fellow is like the rest of us—on the make—a rake-off for his risk, that's all."

"You're right, governor," assented Buff with a jerky nod that was a stroke of genius.

"Waste no time on the trifle of a few odd dollars," went on Wolcott, "when there's two green ones in the next room ready to pluck."

"Who are they?" questioned Tyrell.

"Oh, some fellows who fairly broke their way in—one a young sport who don't know one card from another and is throwing his money away as if it was matches, and the other a gawk of a bumpkin. See here, Bill."

"On hand, governor!" replied Buff.

While Tyrell was adjusting the new substitute for his missing limb, Wolcott crossed over to a door, opened it, and beckoned Buff to follow.

The new apartment held the ordinary furniture of a sleeping-room, but upon a table was a good-sized bundle done up in heavy manilla paper.

"Came while you were away," announced Wolcott, touching the bundle with his hand.

"Ah?" mumbled Buff, cautiously.

"Yes, I got just what you listed."

"That's right."

"And now you're provided for, I suppose?"

"Sure."

"Get your kit in order then. I don't say we'll start right away, but I want you to be prepared at a minute's notice."

"I'll be ready on the tap of the bell!" declared Buff, energetically.

"That's the way to talk. You know what I told you this afternoon?"

Buff began to flounder.

"Well, what of it?" he ventured, audaciously.

"You do this job squarely, thoroughly, secretly, and it won't be any miserly hundred dollars."

"Won't it, now?"

"Double."

"Say! you're generous, seeing around here we won't take long."

"No, of course it mustn't take long," retorted Wolcott, and Buff was squelched summarily in his effort to draw out the liberal employer he had just discovered.

"We guarantee to get you out of the city so no prying cop will spot you," went on Wolcott. "Meantime, smoke a pipe, drink here at your will. No one will intrude on you."

"Oh, I'll be busy getting the kit in order, you know."

"Yes, that's it. Better lock the door after me so no one will happen in on you."

"All right."

Buff gave a chuckle the minute he was alone.

"Made it!" he gloated; "not only made it, but neck and heels right in with these two fellows. Never struck a false note or made a wrong break. Oh, Hawkeye Bill to the end of the chapter with Tyrell and Wolcott! The bundle, though, the 'kit,' the 'job'! What's expected of me? I'd better find that out before I begin to crow."

Buff lifted the bundle. It was heavy. He shook it. It rattled.

He opened it. A dozen or more small parcels rolled out upon the table.

Buff undid the largest of the parcels. Several pieces of steel were revealed.

Buff gave a prodigious start.

"I'm in it deep," he breathed. "My friends have guessed it, though. Here's a jimmy—a burglar's sectional jimmy—and a brace and bit, and this—cold chisel and pincers. Oh, it's a 'kit,' sure enough and I'm expected to use them!"

Buff sat down to cast up the situation. On the whole, it rather pleased him.

It was one of the most novel he had ever encountered.

He had been right in guessing that the mere securing of the twenty thousand dollars from the Traders' Mercantile Bank was only a step in some broader scheme.

In this, if luck favored, he was to take an active part, and he saw along the



arely, thorough kinds of possibilities of learning why  
any miserly bank notes had been cut in two,  
ere their other half was, and, most  
important of all, what had become of  
Jack Carter's missing detective, Bob  
us, seeing a ret.

Buff approached the door he had just  
couldn't take a look, and listened. Then he ventured  
iff was squeak-softly turn the key and open the door  
to draw out a crack.

Just discovered Tyrell and Wolcott had left the room—  
t you out of it undoubtedly gone into the main  
will spot a yombling apartment to pluck "the birds"  
eantime, some latter had told about.

ur will. No! "I'll take a peep beyond the curtain  
nder to see how the layout looks,"  
ting the kid kissed Buff. "No, I won't. Whew!"

Buff gave a tremendous aspiration, and  
a tremendous start accompanied it.

r lock the door. From the main gambling room just  
happen in an arose a reckless, hilarious cry:

"One hundred dollars a side!"  
That was Paul Elliot's voice, unmis-  
sably.

ted; "not o' "Whoop it up! We've got money to  
els right in win!"

er struck a fear. Those were the tones of Jack Burton.  
reak. Oh, Buff's eyes opened to the full realiza-  
of the chap on of an exciting fact.

! The bunch Two other members of Nick Carter's  
! What's detective circle had struck the hot trail  
find that well as himself!

It was heard

## CHAPTER VII.

### AT BAY.

or more small  
e table. "The deuce!" muttered Buff in some  
st of the dismay.

e revealed. He was so startled to find a sudden  
omplication arise in his smooth-sailing  
t. "Migans, that he ventured across the inter-  
Here's a jiminy apartment and peered past its  
nny—and curtains.

s—cold chise "They're there, sure enough," breathed  
sure enough Buff. "What can they hope to find out?"

em!" At a table sat four persons—Wolcott  
o the situation and Tyrell, Paul Elliot and Jack Burton.  
eased him. The latter was made up in one of the  
novel he best disguises in the Carter wardrobe.

From head to foot he was the typical  
essing that toggling, big-mouthed country bumpkin  
enty thousand sitting the city for the first time with  
mercantile Badenty of money to spare.

oader schem Just as carefully disguised, only at the  
he was to rather extreme—the smart, self-conceited  
along the life heap sport—Paul Elliot was doing his

best to sustain a character, costly, but  
bound to make him a welcome visitor to  
this den of vice.

Bob Ferret had saved to Paul a fortune  
and his good name, and Buff instantly  
guessed that it would not be a question of  
hundreds or even thousands with Paul  
when it came to getting any kind of a  
footing that would put him on the track  
of his missing comrade.

"A hundred a side!" he heard Paul  
repeat, and Jack, playing aptly the city-  
dazzled enthusiast, pulled out a great fat  
wallet that made Tyrell's eyes glisten  
with covetous expectancy, boisterously  
exclaiming:

"Whoop it up! We've got money to  
burn!"

The cards were dealt, the two schemers  
of course being partners.

There was a quick run through the  
pasteboards, and at every hand, because  
they did not understand them or pur-  
posely, Paul made some mistake or Jack  
some fool-break.

Tyrell drew in the stakes with a pleased  
smile and touched a bell.

A nimble darky shot forward from the  
alcoved sideboard at the end of the room.

Tyrell ordered a cigar. The others re-  
fused. As the cripple took a match from  
the server he stared hard at the waiter.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Who are  
you?"

"Me, sah—why, sah, I'se de gemman  
as runs de boofey, it seems to me."

"Great goodness!" ejaculated Buff.  
"Number three!"

There was nothing familiar in the sable  
attendant but his voice, and that voice  
belonged to Larry Moore.

"Oh, you're 'the gemman,' are you!"  
sneered Tyrell. "Where's Dan, the regu-  
lar?"

"Reg'lar done out to-night, sah," came  
the prompt explanation. "Spelled him,  
sah, spell him till mawnin', sah."

"Oh, that's it? Your deal, Wolcott."

Buff studied the disappearing form of  
the pretended darky thoughtfully.

How Larry had got appointed substi-  
tute for the regular waiter he could only  
guess—bribery, a bold and clever assump-  
tion—there were many ways.

So far Larry was making a great play,  
but Buff trampled, as he recalled past



experiences in which the well-intentioned but heedless amateur had blundered at the wrong time.

He drew back as Larry, who had been loitering about from spot to spot arranging chairs, putting aside cards, dusting off unused tables, approached the very apartment where he lurked.

Buff retreated to the next room, nearly closing its door.

He was not unwilling to have a word with Larry, to get an inkling of the intentions of his three friends, but he did not wish to startle him by too sudden a revelation.

Larry shook out the curtains busily. Buff saw him glance keenly into the large room, and then as if sure no one was watching he made a swift glide across the smaller one.

Two overcoats hung on hooks, they belonged to Wolcott and Tyrell.

Over them slid the nimble fingers of the disguised Larry, paused at a pocket, dove into it, and his hand came out with a jerk and he barely suppressed a cry of delight.

"The other half of the banknotes!" breathed the staring, startled Buff, himself thrown completely off his balance.

He caught a flash of "the long green," he marked indisputably the same keen-cut edges, the same bulk, the same shape and form as of the other half he carried in an inside pocket.

At that moment, as Larry stood quivering with animation and Buff was about to reveal himself, there came a sharp hail from the next room.

"Hey! Dan, Cuff, whoever you are—cigars!"

"Yes, sah! yes, sah!" answered Larry, thrusting the package into his pocket and gliding past Buff's view.

"He's got them," soliloquized Buff—"he's got the banknotes—he's been nosing around everywhere with a purpose. I saw him fumbling among the coats near the sideboard, ransacking its drawers. Larry, your bull-headed mascot luck has counted you another score!"

Buff came back to the curtains. Cards and money were flying at the table where his two other friends sat.

Buff's glance passed beyond them to where Larry had stationed himself.

He stood near the sideboard, and keen observing Buff traced subdued excitement even under his sable mask.

He saw Larry tear a strip from the blank edge of a newspaper lying there, pencil on it, fold the scrap and start forward.

"What's he up to?" muttered the watchful Buff.

Larry hovered about the table where Jack and Paul sat. As the latter dropped a card Larry bent to pick it up.

Buff imagined he slid the note he had written into Paul's hand, for Larry instantly sauntered away.

The next moment he learned his mistake, and his pulses quickened as he saw a low-browed hanger-on of the place, who was watching the game, lean forward.

It was to pick up the wad of paper, read it, look slightly puzzled, and then with a suspicious expression of face arise and walk behind the chair in which Tyrell sat.

He deftly whispered in Tyrell's ear, and placed the outspread paper across his knee.

Tyrell looked surprised. Then he gave a vivid start.

His face grew red, then white, his eye flared, and throwing down his cards to the amazement of the others at the table he called out harshly.

"Hey, you ducky! come here!"

"Yes, sah! yes, sah!" assented Larry, ambling up promptly.

He might have been warned by the look in Tyrell's eye.

Still, he advanced without a tremor, straight up to the cripple.

Just as he got within arm's reach, Tyrell made a grab.

It was to pull Larry's head momentarily under his arm, as suddenly some design accomplished, to throw him forcibly back.

The staring Buff felt that a critical moment had arrived.

Tyrell had rubbed the lampblack off one cheek of the pretended ducky.

Tyrell had pulled off forcibly the kinky wig he wore.

Unmasked to the most casual glance, panting slightly, Larry stood waiting for the next development.

"Who are you?"



In a malevolent hiss Tyrell drove out the words.

Jack and Paul sprang up. Buff saw them make a movement that placed them between Larry and Tyrell.

The latter gave a spring forward. Quick as a flash he had drawn out a long-bladed knife.

"Stand back!" he ordered to Jack, who was most in his path. "There's something wrong here."

"No!" voiced Jack, sharply, and one hand went to his hip pocket.

"Ah! you're armed this time, are you?" shouted Tyrell in a gibe of hissing fury.

"What do you mean by 'this time'?" demanded Jack, cool as a cucumber.

"I mean—up! the last one of you!" cried Tyrell, taking in every person in the room in a flashing glance—"Nick Carter's spies are in your midst!"

"What's that!" cried a dozen voices in unison.

"Wolcott," continued the cripple, waving the scrap of paper in his hand—"a message from that pretended ducky to these pretended greenhorns! Listen: 'Have got the other half of the long green. Shall I signal the police?' "

"Confusion!" fairly yelled Wolcott.

Click—a chorus of sharp, ominous sounds came menacingly from all parts of the room.

A slow approaching circle began to draw a deathline about the three devoted detective friends.

Buff's breath came quick. The culminating moment of a great crisis impended.

He looked about for some weapon in a frenzied way.

A cane lay against a pipe that, with a little wheel attached to it, ran out from the wall.

"What does that message mean?"

Tyrell's snarling voice rang out wonderfully clear.

"Find out!"

Brave as a lion, Jack Burton shot forth the bold defiance.

Buff reached for the cane but passed it by as he guessed the mission of the wheel and pipe.

Click! in the outside room—three seconds might mean three precious lives.

Snap! at the side of the ex-king of the newsboys of New York.

Buff had turned the wheel that controlled the gas supply, and in one swift second the entire place was plunged into darkness.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BEATEN BACK.

The wildest confusion instantly prevailed.

"Make safe for home with what you've got!" Buff heard Jack's incisive voice direct to Larry.

The roar, rush and clatter that precedes an anticipated police descent rang through the main gambling room.

Chairs banged over, tables jarred, and bodies came in contact and footsteps scurried and stumbled.

If the room had not been so closely blinded the outside street lights would have afforded some illumination.

As it was, the sudden transition made the place appear as dark as the bottom of some shut-in pit.

Buff could not remain inactive. He took a half-glide, half-slide across the floor, aimed directly for the spot where he had last seen Jack and Paul standing.

He bolted up against some one—he ventured a guess.

"Jack," he spoke quickly, but with caution. "Jack Burton."

"Buff!"

"S-st! Take my hand, bring the others. Follow softly."

He began to pull Jack gently along. He could only hope that his other two comrades were in Jack's tow.

Getting past the curtains, however, Buff soon learned by reaching out that Jack alone was with him.

"The others?"

"They'll take care of themselves. It's all arranged."

"But—"

Kipetty-snap!

Buff gave Jack a pull past the curtains. Some one in the room had just thought of casting light on the scene by springing up a shade.

Buff took a hurried glimpse through the main apartment.

So far as he could make out from vague



outlines, Paul and Larry were not among the groping, jostling mob.

"You must get out," spoke Buff, hurriedly.

"That's what I want to do."

"In there—be quick. Some one is coming."

Into the room Wolcott had assigned to him Buff pushed Jack.

After him he sped, and closed and locked the door none too soon.

Lights in the larger apartment flashed on suddenly.

Buff discerned this as he pressed close to the keyhole, as also that Wolcott had reached the wheel controlling the gas supply.

Then as he saw him rush into the larger compartment and shout out some hurried orders, and jet after jet was lit amid a mighty scrambling of the mob there, Buff ran to and threw up the window.

"Get, Jack!" he urged. "I'm in the dandy position of my life to run down these fellows by staying right with them."

"But——"

"Don't complicate things, don't compromise me. Leave everything to me. I'll get word to you."

"What is there below?"

"Space between two buildings, it's only one story down. Here!"

Buff reached for the rope cord that had encircled the package of burglar's tools.

He trailed it over the sill, and whipped its other end about his hand two or three times.

"To guide you. Climb out," he spoke, quickly. "Pshaw! Hurt? Oh, Jack! Jack!"

Jack had slipped the last few feet of his descent, and the anxious Buff heard him land with a slap.

"I'm all right," called up Jack.

"Catch."

"Eh?"

"I've got something for you. This makes the whole of it. Give it to Mr. Carter. Jack! Jack!"

Buff trilled to a frenzy. Jack had not heard his last words, or misunderstood.

It had suddenly occurred to Buff that the wisest thing he could do was to get rid of his half of the cut-in-two bank-notes.

A long, perilous venture lay before him. There was no point to be made in retaining possession of them, rather a personal risk.

That end of the case, with the safe escape of Larry with the other half, would be closed up.

So Buff, after that hail to Jack, dropped the package at the dimly outlined form of his comrade.

The next instant he saw his mistake, and a series of sharp, quick occurrences transpired that almost took his breath away.

Of a sudden the gloomy space below was illuminated as gas jets were lighted in the lower floor.

Buff saw Jack spreading across to a sheltering angle opposite.

For shelter was needed. From a window shot down and unfolded a pair of those patent iron stairs in use at some theatres as an exigency means of reaching the ground in case of fire.

Three of the late inmates of the gambling room stumbled and tumbled down these.

From doors on the ground floor several others ran out, and in the lead was Wolcott.

He caught sight of Jack and he started forward, but as he did so, Jack drew safely back, edging a levelled revolver around the corner of the brick wall.

There was nothing to break the clear aim of his enemies toward the street except a low fire hydrant.

From this, coiling, ran a length of hose, and the turning wrench was in place, as if before the storm some one had been wetting down the court.

Wolcott and half-a-dozen of his crowd were massed ten feet away, swaying, wavering, getting no chance to fire at the shielded Jack, and held back from a rush by his squarely levelled weapon.

All this Bob saw and could not act, dared not follow the hot impulse directing him, to spring down and take his part in a conflict of many against one, and that one a close comrade.

Already he had done enough, in the turning off of the gas, in running Jack through his room, to arouse the keenest suspicions of Tyrell and Wolcott, if they got an inkling of that action.



What was consuming Buff's very soul with anxiety and suspense more than all else, however, was an added torture he could scarcely endure.

Jack had not caught the dropped bundle of the cut-in-two bank bills.

In full view, just below, lay that precious parcel that had been wrested from the cork leg.

Buff's eyes were glued upon it. Jack had missed it, Jack in the scurry of escape had not understood Buff's directions when he dropped the package.

Buff dared not descend. He would be seen, he would come suspiciously in full view of Wolcott and the others.

Then something happened that dashed his very last hopes—confusion, sudden riot, in the paved space below.

Wolcott and his cohorts, acting on some hastily arranged plan, made a dodging forward movement.

They did not fire at Jack—they did not seem to want to alarm the street outside—but they kept their weapons in menacing play, and were practically surrounding him.

Jack backed out of the court slowly. He held his weapon directed straight in front of him.

His enemies gained a few inches at every step, but dared not risk too sudden a dash.

Suddenly, like a phantom cleaving space, a dark figure shot down from the direction of the street.

It was Larry.

He looked heroic, even with his streaked face, his ruffled hair, his incongruous disordered attire.

He reached the fire plug, and there he stopped.

Buff saw his hand whirl the wrench handle around like lightning, once, twice, three times.

There was a splutter, a bursting hiss.

Buff saw him spring to the nozzled end of the hose. Up it came.

"Run!"

That one word Larry hurled at Jack. Then he prepared to cover his escape.

Directing the terrific spurt of water that now gushed forth squarely at Wolcott and the others, Larry stood undaunted as some fireman on the edge of a crumbling roof.

Raining forth a distracting, confusing deluge, a force blinding, breath-depriving sense-bewildering, Larry toppled over two men outright, drove another slam against the building as if pushed, made the others run for cover.

Down went the hoze. Like a sprite Larry put back for the street.

Before Wolcott could recover his wits the space was empty—both boys had disappeared.

"After them!" snarled a rageful voice just under the window where Buff stood watching palpitatingly, and out came Tyrell.

"They're gone, safe enough," retorted Wolcott. "It's a run, boys," to those about him. "The police will probably be down on us inside of five minutes."

"Ha!"

Buff's heart sank like lead.

Tyrell had discovered what he feared he would discover, for it lay directly in his path.

With an eager start the cripple made out the package of cut-in-two banknotes.

With a great, gloating cry he seized it.

Buff groaned in spirit.

The precious package that had been the reward of so much peril and adventure was once more back in the possession of his enemies.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BUFF, THE BURGLAR.

Buff closed another chapter in the history of the mutilated treasury notes by gently closing down the window.

He turned the key in the lock of the door, threw himself on the bed, rolled up in a blanket, and prepared to await further developments.

Soon they came. The sharp, snarling voice of the cripple sounded in the next room:

"Who turned off the gas—that's what I want to know!"

"Another of the detective crowd, of course—who else?" answered Wolcott's tones.

"Has he got away, too?"

"It looks so!"

"Why, the place must have been full of them!"

"We want to slide, prompt. Hey! you wake up!"



Wolcott opened the door of the room Buff was in, lit the gas, and gave the figure on the bed a shake.

"On hand, governor!" growled Buff.

"Pack up your kit."

"Pack it is."

"There's trouble afloat—no time for snoozing. Plenty of that when we arrive!"

"Where?"

"Where I told you—where your services are needed, of course. Be brisk, now!"

Buff started in to make as compact a parcel as possible out of the tools on the table.

He had got them into quite a portable bulk when Wolcott reappeared.

"Follow," he said, simply.

Only one jet burned in the main room, and this was turned low.

The place was now entirely deserted except for themselves, and the shades were once more pulled clear down.

Wolcott and Tyrell proceeded straight to the sideboard, whirled one castored end out from the wall, slid a secret panel, passed through, and Buff following him, found himself in complete darkness.

The end of a cane was pressed into his hand, and he was told to keep tight hold of it.

It was blind progress and guesswork for Buff for the next five minutes.

They advanced cautiously from one room to another under Wolcott's guidance, up a flight of stairs, down a second, and through a narrow cellar.

Buff had no doubt but that they had passed through one of those tunnel exits with which the policeman had claimed the square was honeycombed.

"Stop a bit," spoke Wolcott.

There was the jangle of a bunch of keys. Then a lock rattled.

A door swung back, was closed and relocked, and Buff stared curiously around as a candle was lighted.

It was a boarded-up cellar room of some kind, held two benches and a table, and as at some distance the sounds of clinking glasses and noisy voices could be traced. Buff decided that this was some saloon annex that was a hiding haunt.

"I'll go and see what arrangements I can make," spoke Wolcott.

"Make them sure," directed Tyrell, anxiously. "Half a dozen of Nick Carter's infernal spies on our trail in as many hours!—that means we won't leave the square safely by any ordinary route."

"Oh, I'll fix it all right," declared Wolcott.

The minute he left the place Buff threw himself on a bench, turned his face to the wall with a yawn, and was soon imitating a snore.

He had no fancy to leave the way open for a conversation with the alert and suspicious cripple.

Tyrell, however, paid no attention to him. Buff heard him rustling over what sounded like papers, and muttering to himself.

He was thus engaged, when suddenly the door through which Wolcott had departed reopened, and that individual stepped into the room.

"All ready for us in half an hour—hello! what you got there?" he demanded, sharply interrupting himself. "My cut bills? Lucky these fellows dropped them after stealing them from my coat."

"Wolcott, they're not your bills."

"Eh?"

"I say not your bills. I supposed they were, but, see—the left half, aren't they? Those were mine."

"Yes, so they are. What does this mean?"

"That those fellows got away with your half."

"That's sure."

"That they dropped accidentally the half they got out of the cork leg earlier in the evening, and that proves that they're one and the same crowd."

"It can't be any other way."

"Do I keep these?"

"You may. See here, Tyrell, square's square with me. Here was the agreement: When you drew that twenty thousand dollars, we cut them in two; I kept half, you kept half. When the job we're headed for, the grand final play was concluded, I was to give you what I held only as security for your faithful performance of the contract."

"Yes, that was the way of it," growled Tyrell—"a crazy way, too, as I said at the start, but you're a wilful man and



ere's no withstanding you, only—how es it bring me out?"

"How do you mean?"

"Nick Carter's crowd have got the er half of these bills?"

"I'm afraid so."

"These are worth just so much waste per, then, alone. We'll never get the er half back."

"No, Tyrell," assented Wolcott, "I'll mit we may never get them back, but e Carter crowd will turn what they've t over to Wadhams, the bank teller and 'll be in the same boat as yourself."

"Well?"

"Do you imagine he won't put up nething handsome to buy your half? n't worry, I'll do the negotiating. It's fortunate, this unforeseen block, but u shan't lose anything by it."

"You promise that?"

"I do. Let us get the job we're now aded for settled, and I'll guarantee you an't lose a penny you calculated on."

"It's a go!" declared Tyrell, bracing o wonderfully. "You say we leave in l an hour?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"There we are!" exclaimed Wolcott, a whistle sounded beyond the door.

"Wake up that Bill."

Buff roused promptly at Tyrell's prod- ing, stuffed his bundle under his arm, d slouched to the door.

"One at a time," directed Wolcott, and ok Buff first.

At the end of a passageway leading in- a little back yard stood a common milk agon.

"Get in," ordered Wolcott, lifting the ver of the front box where milk cans ere usually kept.

Buff stowed himself and his bundle as rected. He heard Wolcott come back ith Tyrell. There was the sound of stling about in the space behind the iver's seat.

"Don't stop for anything," sounded Wolcott's tones.

"No," responded the driver of the ehicle they had impressed into service.

Buff did some vivid thinking after the agon had started up, despite its sharp lting occasioned by constant turns.

To what was his present adventure

leading him? He had taken Hawkeye Bill's place. How would he meet the oc- casion when called upon to show up the burglar's professional skill? As the vehi- cle slowed up a little, he heard Wolcott's cautious voice.

"No one following?"

"No," came the reply.

"They're dizzy-headed if they are—that was a roundabout dash! Now then, direct for the point I told you."

"Yes."

Buff dared not venture to lift the cover of his hiding-place to peer out the least particle, for its lid faced the driver squarely.

They proceeded quite a distance farther. Then the vehicle turned from the road crossed a soft, loamy surface and came to a halt.

"Get some air, if you want it," ordered Wolcott, lifting the lid of the front box.

Buff followed the speaker and Tyrell down from the wagon.

They were in the midst of a fenced-in lot somewhere at the upper end of the city.

Looming directly before them was a structure with windows closely boarded up, apparently the unfinished wing of some residence.

Up its steps Wolcott proceeded, and Tyrell following him, they began to pry from place one of the boards covering up the front entrance.

They got it out of place and stepped through the aperture.

Buff had lifted his bundle to the lower stone step and sat down beside it.

"Hi!" softly hailed Wolcott, sticking his head back through the aperture and beckoning to the driver. "Lift out my overcoat and come up here. I want to talk with you."

"In a minute."

The horse gave a jump just then. It gave another and another, and Buff opened his eyes wide as he saw a myste- rious piece of interesting side play.

Evidently the driver of the milk wagon did not crave an interview with his em- ployer, Wolcott.

As well he did not seem to care whether Wolcott got his overcoat or not, for he might have thrown it out readily, as it lay on the seat directly beside him.



Why Buff guessed this, was because the driver slyly, secretly, was prodding the horse with the whip against the ribs on the far side, as if to incite it to restiveness.

In this he succeeded. The animal broke from a jump to a run.

Buff watched horse and wagon fly across the lot and through the break in the fence. They struck the road.

The minute they did so, out came bounding the driver.

He still retained the whip in his hand. With it he gave the horse a fearful slash that sent it tearing down the road like mad.

Then gliding toward the nearest tree-box, he was lost beyond Buff's range of vision.

"Done on purpose!" breathed Buff; "the runaway, the jump—who is he?"

Out came Wolcott at that moment, looking startled at the absence of the wagon.

"Where is he?" broke instantly from his lips.

"Who?"

"The driver—the wagon."

"Horse ran away," Buff thought it best to report.

"What's that?"

"Yes. Hear that clatter? two squares down the road now."

"And my coat? Tyrell, come here."

The cripple came out promptly.

"You wait here," directed Wolcott. "The horse ran away. When the fellow comes back, get my overcoat. We're making a nice racket! You, Bill."

"All right," nodded Buff.

"Pick up your bundle."

"Yes, governor."

"And follow me."

Beyond the doorway Wolcott took up a lighted lantern. He led the way up an unfinished stairway.

Everything was dusty, old and neglected, every outside window was boarded up tight.

After proceeding through several apartments Wolcott halted where a blank stone wall separated the wing from some structure beyond.

In it was set an iron door, with an iron frame around it and a lock big as that of a jail.

"There's your work," spoke Wolcott. "That door?" murmured Biff, in a little dismay.

"Exactly."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Why, crack it, of course!" came Wolcott's prompt reply. "That's what you're here for, isn't it?"

## CHAPTER X.

### SLICK AND QUICK.

Buff sized up the iron door, his kit of tools, and then the situation.

"It's a queer go," he ruminated, curiously. "How am I going to get out of this fix?"

Wolcott watched him interestedly as he ran his hand across the stanch barrier.

"Suppose I can bust that lock, eh?" spoke Buff, to gain time to think how he should set about making the pretense of a start.

"Suppose?" ejaculated Wolcott, forcibly. "I expect, after all the brag about your crack reputation!"

"It's got a steel-plated box case like a safe."

"Bore it."

"And bolts like crowbars."

"Saw them."

"Give me time, governor—give me a show to sort of take in the layout, see?" insinuated Buff, in his sharp irritation of Hawkeye Bill's manner and tone.

"I'll be back soon," returned Wolcott. "Now, my friend, just one warning. There's people living beyond this wall."

"Let 'em live, I won't disturb 'em."

"See that you don't. They're not directly on the other side of that door, but near enough to be attracted by any unnecessary racket. Be slick and be quick—your money's waiting for you."

"Just to open that door?"

"That's all."

"All right."

Buff made a brisk ado untying his bundle until he heard the far echo of Wolcott's footsteps.

Then he slid the lantern's rays all across the door.

"Simply couldn't cut out one screw, let alone budge half a ton. I doubt if Hawkeye Bill could, either," he declared.

Buff knew enough about vault doors to



understand that for whatever purpose this had been set in place—to shut out people or shut them in—it answered its purpose admirably.

He noticed a little grating just above. Besides that there was not a break in what seemed to be solid stone two feet thick.

Buff spread out the tools so as to make a great show, and he kept up a great talking for the next ten or fifteen minutes.

It would be an easy thing to break off the edge of a chisel, to disable the brace crew, to hurt his hand, to insist on some other auxiliary to the outfit that it would take time to secure.

He might even get out of the building now unseen, summon his friends from Nick Carter's, surround and capture the chemers, but all this would prevent a demonstration of their "big job" about which Buff was so anxious to learn something.

Before he could make up his mind definitely to some plan of action, there was the sound of footsteps, and he heard Tyrell's voice saying:

"He's gone back to the den?"

"Wagon and all."

"It looks so," returned Wolcott. "I hope he takes care of my overcoat."

"Of course he will. Seems to me you're mighty careless of your valuables."

"Why so? Who supposed outsiders were coming in to dive for that money package in the pocket the first thing?"

"And now you've left the bottle in it?"

"The bottle of fading ink, yes."

"That is invaluable, because the fellow who sold it to you has gone back to Japan, and you can't get any more."

"With the thousand dollars I paid him for it. Oh! it's safe, though—of course we'll get it back at the den. No particular use for it till we get abroad, anyway. When the bank check scheme we've rested here with such success will keep us in pin money in the gay European capitals. Here's our big stroke of work, first. Nearly two o'clock"—there was the snap of a watch case—"well?"

The two men had come up to the iron door and Buff.

The latter had sprang into industrious action when he first heard them approach-

ing, and was probing in the keyhole of the lock with a pick.

"This is a tough graft, governor," he announced.

"You don't mean to say you can't fetch it!" exclaimed Wolcott.

"Fetch it? Of course he can fetch it. Hawkeye Bill, who went through three sets of safe doors in the Farmers' National as if they were tissue paper, fazed at a common door lock! He could do this asleep," declared Tyrell. "That's why I got him. Give him time, Wolcott."

"How much time does he want? We must be beyond that door by two o'clock."

"Do you hear?" spoke Tyrell to Buff.

The pretended Hawkeye Bill nodded assentingly.

"We'll go down again and keep a lookout for intruders," continued Tyrell.

"Remember, Bill, in twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes," muttered Buff. "If they said twenty hours it would be more like it. The game's up for me."

He fumbled about the lock in an aimless way with this tool and that, reflecting that when his employers returned there would be something of a row.

His inability to do what Hawkeye Bill was famous for would either arouse suspicions or lead to his prompt banishment from the place.

"Time pretty near up," he announced grimly at last.

He threw down the tool he was handling, and waited for the return of Wolcott and Tyrell, and discovery or dismissal.

"He gave the obstinate lock a dissatisfied slap with his left hand, for it had blocked progress that so far had been famously satisfactory to him.

"I say!"

Buff stared very hard.

As if his hand had power to do what chisels and jimmies and drills could not—as if possessed of some magic magnetic power of necromancy—the slap was followed by a click.

Scarcely crediting his vision, Buff saw the door jar, move, and swing slowly open.

What had opened it? Who? A disbeliever in magic in the bluntest sense of the word, Buff recovered his poise with a dash forward.



He bounded to the aperture and peered from its threshold.

It was too dark to see ahead, but he fancied he heard retreating footsteps.

"Some one unlocked this door," soliloquized the mystified Buff. "Who? What for? One of the boys!"

He just chanced to catch a glimpse of the reverse side of the door in a hasty glance past it as he heard Wolcott and Tyrell returning.

Near the lock was a mark in chalk—two of them.

They formed a familiar symbol known to every member of Nick Carter's juvenile detective corps.

It was one of those understood marks which Nick's pupils employed when on a trail to indicate to their fellows that they had "been around"—a sign, a guide.

"Whoever opened that door marked the sign," exclaimed Buff, in more than ordinary excitement. "I'm stumped for once! Who did it? Which one?"

He quickly erased the chalk inscription and sprang back into the other room.

Hurriedly pulling the door shut, he flung himself down in an easy attitude of indolence just as Tyrell and Wolcott approached.

"Hello!" ejaculated the latter, with a sharp frown. "You're either loitering or sleeping half the time—you must have been born tired!"

"Yes, this won't do, Bill!" put in Tyrell, irritably. "Get back to your work."

"Work done, governor."

"Eh?"

"Door opened—that's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but——"

"Door's all right."

"It's——"

"Opens, I say. Try it."

"Good for you!"

Wolcott swung the door open and gave Buff a hearty slap of appreciation on the shoulder.

"I told you he was a good one," commented Tyrell.

"And never even scratched the lock. Say! this is magic," pursued Wolcott.

"Now then?" insinuated Tyrell.

"Yes, now then! Bring along a screw-

driver, Bill, you won't need anything heavier for the rest of your job."

Buff's face fell as he realized at this announcement that he was not past the danger line yet.

Wolcott had taken up the lantern, Buff following, was led into a large, bare, hall-like apartment.

He noticed what his companions were not looking for—freshly disturbed dust where some person had recently crossed the room—the person, he guessed, who had helped him out of his dilemma by unlocking the iron door.

The footsteps led up to a plain oak door before which Wolcott set down the lantern.

"Quietly, now, for we're nearer the game," he half whispered.

"You're to spring the lock in the door," directed Tyrell.

Buff inspected it, and breathed more relievedly.

Here was something not beyond his powers—he saw that at a glance.

He had turned many a lock more stronger with a simple piece of wire.

There was just such among the kit in the other room.

"I'll get something to fix that in a minute," he promised, and sped back to the next apartment.

Buff had to grope among the tools to find what he was after.

Then he hurried back over the threshold of the iron-cased doorway with a little precipitation, for he imagined he heard a rustle behind him.

It was all shadow and gloom except within the direct halo of the lantern.

Toward this Buff put forward, but a trifle startled.

"I declare, some one followed me over the threshold of that door—I am sure some new-comer is in this room!" he muttered.

"Hurry up, Bill," spoke Wolcott.

"Here I am," announced Buff, approaching.

"Bill it is!" spoke a voice in precisely the same accents.

Buff came forward from the gloom on one side, his parrot-like counterpart approached from the other.

"Whew!" uttered Buff, in a sharp, involuntary breath, and stood rooted to the spot.



floor stock still in stupefaction and dismay.

There were two Hawkeye Bills on the scene!

And the last one to arrive was—the real one!

## CHAPTER XI.

### ON TIME.

Wolcott gave a prodigious start—Tyrell hunched back with a quick, suspicious snarl.

"What's this?" he shot out, sharply.

"It's me, Bill," pronounced the newcomer, and it was Bill. "The question is, what's that?"

His bullet-shaped head somewhat in the pose of an ugly bull pup bracing for a fight, his leery eyes fixed on Buff, his tongue lolling like that of an enraged tiger, as he took in the individual who wore his recent attire, disguise and all, Hawkeye Bill began to pugnaciously roll up the sleeves of his coat—Buff's coat.

Buff turned. It was a dash or nothing now.

In the face of the sudden, unexpected climax that hovered he felt that this was no place for him.

In a bound Bill was after him. In a slide he crossed his path, put out a foot, and was on top of Buff as the latter tripped up, coming down upon the dusty floor with a slam.

"Bring the lantern," directed Tyrell, quickly.

Bull was strong as an ox. He had Buff face upward and was fairly astride of him as Wolcott came forward with the light.

"Now then, what's the rights of this tangle?" demanded the cripple, excitedly.

"Here's the wrong of it!" cried Bill.

He ripped the patches of false whiskers from Buff's cheeks and gathered off the goggles in a crush.

Buff shrank a trifle from the glowing, sinister eyes of Tyrell, for as his real features came more and more into view, those of the cripple assumed an expression positively murderous.

Then they flamed into sudden recognition, and he hissed out:

"Wolcott, who is he!"

"How should I know?"

"Look again. In the room where they broke the door down—two of them—this

is the fellow who fired the hand grenades."

"What! It is—one of the Nick Carter crowd!"

"Just."

"He's in with the police, I know that," declared Hawkeye Bill. "Listen, coveys: He's a good one if he fooled you all this time—he's a better one if he opened that triple lock yonder."

"He did," affirmed Walcott.

"He ought to be a professional, then, for it's a marker, I tell you!"

"But his taking your place?"

"Taking it? Gathering it up free gratis for nothing—falling right into his hands," observed Bill, emphatically. "I was nabbed. He just makes a model of me, and plays it soft on you. I owe him one! He probably had me pinched."

Bill gritted his teeth, and brought one brawny fist down squarely aimed for Buff's face.

It missed, because Buff saw it coming and dodged his head aside.

The mean-spirited impulse of a blow directed at a helpless, trebly outnumbered captive made Buff mad.

Quick as lightning he shot up one agile fist. It met Bill's chin and sent it back cracking.

"Why! I'll—I'll mash him!" howled Bill.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," interfered Wolcott. "Let up that noise. Do you want to spoil everything. Stow him, silence him!"

"How? where?" demanded Bill.

Into the wall fronting them was sunk a vault, and its door showed half-open.

"That looks safe enough for a Samson," said Tyrell.

"It will do for him, for a spell," remarked Bill.

He wrestled Buff across the threshold of the vault, and giving him a push, dragged the door shut. Buff heard its lock shoot close.

"I'm getting fairly superstitious at the way that crowd bobs up and bobs down. It will be Ferret next!" Buff indistinctly heard Wolcott's voice speak outside.

"Oh! I'll guarantee his safety," put in Tyrell. "I saw to his case personally."



"I'll be back to finish up that fellow as soon as I'm through duty," observed Bill.

Buff heard him proceed to tell the others in a boastful sort of way how his captors had forgotten when they locked him up in a station house cell with pipe stem barred windows, that he had twice cut his way out of the strongest penitentiary in the country.

"Came here when I found you gone at the den," exclaimed Bill.

"How did you know about this place?" inquired Wolcott, quickly.

"Overheard you tell Tyrell about it."

"You did?"

"What's wrong about that?"

"Nothing, only you're pretty observant."

"I'm anxious to make a stake and get out of New York city," put in Bill. "Come, what you want?"

"That door yonder opened, and I want it done quickly. Tyrell, I'm getting rattled! Suppose some one else of that crowd is around—suppose we do our work, to step out of here into the hands of the police, set on us by this meddling Nick Carter brood!"

"It isn't probable. Let Bill open the door yonder and then go and watch below."

"All right. Now then, cautious, Bill—no more noise than possible."

"I'll work as if my fingers were velvet!" promised the burglar expert.

Buff heard nothing further in the way of conversation.

He groped about in the darkness, trying to estimate the size of his prison place.

"Downed right on the very verge of success," he told himself; "too bad!"

He could imagine the schemers moving forward on the final step of a plan now freed of its last obstacle. They would accomplish their purpose in this place and escape, while he was shut up helpless at the most critical juncture of the case in hand.

They would not only get away with the new booty they were after, but one cut-in-two half of the two hundred one hundred dollar treasury notes would disappear with them.

Worse than that—with them might vanish all trace as to the whereabouts or fate of brave Bob Ferret.

"Maybe not!"

Buff made the forcible comment, as against these gloomy conjectures he set the prospects of a possibility that stimulated him to just the reverse extreme.

Who had unlocked the door for him?

The secret chalk marks said: Some member of Nick Carter's detective school

That meant a friend, an ally in action

Some one else just as shrewd and interested as himself would take up the case where he had been forced to lay it down.

Buff tried to convince himself, on this course of reasoning, that he was philosophically content.

Suddenly, just relapsing into more of an interested and less of an anxious straining of his senses to catch and analyze sounds vaguely audible from the vicinity of the door, Hawkeye Bill was forcing, Buff sniffed uneasily.

"Don't like that," he declared sharply.

What Buff did not like was the air of the vault, growing closer and denser every moment.

He soon made out something that added to both discomfort and danger.

There was a small gas leak in the vault, and while this would be barely noticeable with the door open, confined, it threatened to soon overcharge the circumscribed atmosphere.

Buff tried to locate it, but could not do so accurately, and although he found a pipe he had no means of repairing it.

In five minutes he was gasping for breath, in ten his head was whirling like a top.

He lay flat on the floor and pressed his lips close to the slight crack under the vault door.

This had admitted the sound of voices, but it did not so easily carry away the increasing volume of gas.

"If Hawkeye Bill would only come after me, 'finish me up' in any style he likes but this!" exclaimed Buff. "I'm going under!"

No, he was "coming out!"

"Mercy!"

"Hist!"

Buff reeled forward to meet what by comparison with the fetid air of the vault



seemed a cyclone rush of a most deliciously fresh breeze.

A door had opened at the other end of the vault. Unfinished, like the remainder of that portion of the structure, it had been built to comprise two vaults, to be divided in the centre with a steel partition not yet put in place.

A form met Buff. He staggered against it. A hand gripped his arm firmly. He heard a slight jangling of keys.

"Who is it—who are you?"

"S-st!"

There was manifested only a warning injunction from the mysterious personage who seemed to know everything about Buff's peril always in the nick of time.

Twice this mysterious presence had saved him, during the hour—once from discovery, now from hovering death.

Buff was so dizzy-headed he was glad enough of the support of the stout arm that led him along he knew not whither.

He brushed a half-open door, pressed it back.

Across a room, through some drapery of light material there came a dim radiance.

Vague as it was, dazed by his recent distress as Buff still felt, his glance was eager, starting, as he turned it now upon his preserver.

A finger uplifted in challenging warning repressed a cry, that, uttered, would have rang out in fervent amazement.

Buff's guide and rescuer was Nick Carter's missing detective—

Bob Ferret!

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN DOUBLE HARNESS.

Buff knew enough about Bob Ferret to understand that a signal to silence meant all it conveyed.

A score of anxious inquiries were on his lips, but he was compelled to curb them.

Bob had evidently escaped from the imprisonment that Tyrell had "personally superintended," just as he had escaped times without number before in a like predicament by some clever exercise of ingenuity and vigilance.

He was undoubtedly the driver of the milk wagon—another star play. He had entered the front building, had got hold

of a mysterious bunch of keys, had first seen Buff through the grating above the iron door, had helped him help the schemers on in developing their plans, had witnessed Buff's incarceration in the vault, had rescued him, and now had led him—where?

One irrepressible question Buff had to ask. It was:

"What are those men up to?"

A single response was whispered back, silencing and definite:

"I don't know."

That they were soon to know, however, that they were in close proximity to the spot where all the startling manoeuvres of the night were about to focus, Buff was certain.

Bob asked him to do nothing, and Buff took his cue and simply remained stationary and watched.

Bob glided across the room. A double screen, waist high, he removed from in front of a fire-place, and slipped it to a position running out from the edge of the door with the draperies.

Then he beckoned to Buff. They encoined themselves behind the screen. Over its top and past the edge of the draperies Buff peered.

All was silence in the next apartment. Upon a bed asleep lay an old man.

On a stand at his side was what looked like an electric call bell or alarm, for wires ran from it to the ceiling and across it out of the room.

A lamp burned low on a small library table in the centre of the apartment.

Buff, taking in every detail of the room, felt like a person viewing a stage interior scene that is soon to be the scene of vivid action.

Suddenly, at the end of the apartment next to the wing building that had been so burglariously entered, a door was slowly, cautiously opened.

A man stepped stealthily across its threshold—the play had begun, and the absorbed Buff, like his companion, was all attention.

"Wolcott," murmured Buff.

The man who had gone to so much trouble to enter the building, tiptoed across the room.

Noiselessly he detached the wire from the alarm instrument on the stand and



pocketed a cocked revolver and took up a folded paper lying there, removed a key from a door, proceeded to the table, took from it an ink stand and a pen, placed these on the little stand, and drawing a chair to the side of the bed, sank into it.

For a minute or more Wolcott silently watched the face of the sleeper.

Then drawing out a pistol he levelled it squarely at the man's head.

Buff started with a thrill—Bob's quick hand pressed him back.

Cold-blooded murder was not Wolcott's intention—his next movement showed this.

With his other hand he touched and shook the slumberer.

There was a faint sigh. The man turned over.

With a gasp he came squarely face to face with the revolver.

"One cry, and I fire!"

Tragically distinct, the threat floated on the still air of the apartment.

The old man's face grew to the color of bleached parchment. He seemed to shrivel up.

"It's you!" he articulated in a tremor. "How did you get in here?"

"It is I, your graceless, disowned nephew, indeed! How did I get in here?—easily, Gregory Stone."

"I forbade them to give you admittance, ordered your arrest on sight. They are prepared for you, day or night."

"No, you don't!"

The old man made a dive for the alarm instrument, saw the detached wire, and sank back with a groan.

"Try that again, and you hasten your quietus," declared Wolcott. "Listen to me, and I will be brief. You are a dying man."

"And you will hasten my death—murderer!"

"As you like. You disinherited me. You made your estate over to your measly-faced cousin, a miserly time-server. The will endowing her is here. I found out you kept it always by you. For fear I would bribe the lawyers, eh?"

The invalid uttered a frantic cry as Wolcott fluttered the paper he had taken from the stand.

"Give it to me!" panted the old man.

"If I should die and that should be destroyed——"

"Your fortune would revert to your brother's family, whom you most ardently hate, more than you do me!" railed Wolcott. "Ah! I have touched a sore spot, have I? Then buy it back."

"How? how?" panted the trembling Stone.

"I have a paper here," and Wolcott drew out a document. "It transfers to me, or rather to a legal friend of mine, who will act for me, certain interests you own in Bolton. Sign this paper."

"Never—give you fully half I own?"

"And I return the will."

"I will not—no, though I die, I will not!" vociferated the frantic old man.

"Then you shall die. Listen, Gregory Stone: I am about to leave the country. I am a reckless, desperate man. I swear, if you do not do exactly as I wish, I will kill you, here, now, this minute!"

The revolver glinted dangerously. Buff felt his companion's arm quiver.

"With you dead, I will destroy this will—your property goes, all of it, to those you despise. Sign that paper, and I return the will."

"I—I want time to think of your proposal."

"Take it—two minutes."

Watch in hand, Wolcott turned his back on the invalid as if to give him a fair chance for thought.

"Don't make a move!"

Bob whispered the words into Buff's ear and pushing the screen aside he began to creep past the draperies.

Between them and the bed was a four foot space. It lay in shadow, yet until Bob was well under the bed Buff held his breath for suspense.

What was Bob up to? Buff's fears all took fire again as he saw reach up to the little stand a cautious human hand.

What Bob did Buff could not discern for just then the old man sat up in bed and shut out the view.

Whatever Bob had started to do, however, was apparently executed, for Buff saw him draw back again under the bed and lay there listening.

"Well?" spoke Wolcott, snapping shut the watch with which he had timed Stone.



"I—I'll agree." Buff fancied he traced a crafty light in the old man's eyes. Wolcott seemed to notice it, too, for he eyed him keenly.

He spread out the paper he had produced on the stand.

"I shall want a witness—oh! once that is recorded it's sure and safe, don't count on anything else, Gregory Stone."

"No, no! Let me sign, give me the pen, depart quickly, that is all I ask," he sharply proclaimed the old man.

Wolcott gave utterance to a low, clear whistle.

Instantly, Tyrell came into the room.

Gregory Stone took up the pen Wolcott offered him, dipped it in the ink, and with trembling fingers affixed his signature to the document.

At a turn Tyrell appended his own name as a witness.

Wolcott coolly pocketed the paper.

"The will?" demanded the old man, eagerly.

Wolcott tossed it to him.

"Go, now—such excitement is dangerous to me," pleaded the old man, "you will do as you would."

"In a minute, my esteemed relative."

Wolcott went to the table, picked up a glass, dropped the contents of a little into it—a white powder—poured in some water, and returned to the bed.

"Hold his head. Don't let him utter a word!" he ordered, sharply and suddenly, to Tyrell.

Before the startled Stone could realize what was being done, Tyrell had obeyed Wolcott's mandate, and the latter had hurled the contents of the tumbler down his throat.

The old man groaned spasmodically under the continued pressure of Tyrell's fingers, ready to choke to silence the first word cry.

"You are a clever man, Mr. Gregory Stone," railed Wolcott, "but I have outwitted you! I saw the crafty thought in your eyes—to get rid of me at any cost, as soon as I was gone summon help to invalidate this document by getting another to Bolton ahead of it, but I am a shrewd for you, and——"

Wolcott paused. Tyrell had drawn back from the bed.

"Quieted," he announced simply.

"Sure?"

"Good for a sound twelve hours' sleep, if there ever was one."

"Take it."

From his pocket Wolcott drew the paper Stone had just signed, and handed it to Tyrell.

"And this."

He produced a roll of banknotes.

"You know your task?"

"To spare neither time nor money to reach the registry office at Bolton and record this paper," spoke Tyrell.

"Precisely," nodded Wolcott. "Then come back to me for your reward. The job is done! We have a stake now, that, with the fading ink, will make us Rothschilds inside of a year. Fly!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BROUGHT TO BOOK.

"Don't lose sight of those two men for a single instant!"

Bob Ferret spoke forcibly to his companion, Buff.

Step by step, from the room where there was nothing more for them to do, Nick Carter's two bright young detectives had followed Wolcott and Tyrell.

Back through the door the burglar had forced, past the vault where Buff had so nearly lost his life, into the unfinished wing and to its doorway they shadowed the pair whose daring schemes they at last comprehended perfectly.

Bob peered through the aperture formed by the removed board.

Tyrell had started instantly away on a run.

Wolcott had halted, hailed by Hawk-eye Bill who had, it seemed, been on guard.

"I say, governor, going?" demanded the latter.

"We're through."

"What about the fellow we shut in the vault upstairs?"

"Confound it! yes. You and I have got to go back. No, I can't be hampered with him."

"He'll starve."

"Don't fear. There'll be such a scurrying around these old barracks to-morrow that will soon bring him to light."

"Then let him soak," advised Bill, pointedly.



"So say I. In four hours, at the outside, Tyrell will be back."

"Back where?"

"To the place where we're to meet him."

"Not the old pen—I don't dare risk that now."

"Never fear, I'll stow you safe."

"And the cash, governor?"

"Soon as the bank opens. When Tyrell reports that document recorded, all the Nick Carters in creation won't worry me—I'm rich!"

The twain started away. It was then that Bob had uttered the quick order:

"Don't lose sight of those two men."

"Two? You mean three," corrected his companion.

"Not at all."

"Tyrell?"

"He's gone."

"We can catch him up."

"Not without making a suspicious break past the others, and it's not necessary."

Buff stared marvelingly at his companion.

"Not necessary!"

"Not at all."

"Why! he is the central figure now. He's got that paper——"

"Yes."

"He'll record it."

"Let him."

"Let him? I say, Bob! do you understand——"

"Everything."

"Oh! only it seems to me sort of queer—I declare—I don't see——"

"See here, Buff," spoke Bob, a little sharply. "There's no time for gossip. I say that paper Tyrell has is all right."

"You know best, I suppose, only he has half of the cut-in-two bank notes, too."

"He'll come back with them."

"That's so—shadow it is! I'll take the left hand side of the street."

Shadowing was a science with Nick Carter's pupils, and Buff felt perfectly easy in mind as to running down Wolcott and Hawkeye Bill to cover.

He was by no means, however, so comfortable as to Bob's arrant indifference toward Tyrell.

"I can't understand it!" murmured Buff. "That paper is the pivot of the whole business. What does Bob know that I don't know? Ah, well! he's never wrong—it is through him I got into Nick Carter's detective school, and—blind faith, old boy! Bob knows what he's about."

Wolcott and his burglar companion walked briskly ahead for over a mile.

When they halted it was to enter a cheap hotel a square from the river.

Bob waited till they had secured a room, strolled into the place, looked over the register, and without exciting any suspicion on the point of the sleepy eye clerk, secured the adjoining apartment to that apportioned to the late arrivals.

Bob and Buff went up stairs at once and entered their room. In the next they could hear the voices of the two men they had been trailing.

This seemed to settle affairs for Bob. He whispered to Buff:

"No lights, no noise. Those men are safe to remain here for four hours, maybe all day. At all events, I have something to attend to and will be gone for a spell."

"And I am simply to watch?"

"No, to wait. The case is over, Buff, and you've done your share nobly."

"Say! I'm worse mystified at some of your manoeuvres, now, than at the start."

"You won't be, when that fellow Tyrell gets back," declared Bob, emphatically.

He left with the words. Buff had a dreary wait of it till daylight, past daylight, well on toward seven o'clock.

He could imagine Tyrell reaching Bolton.

He could fancy him bribing the registrar out of his bed to record the document that made the scheming scoundrel, Wolcott, a rich man.

All this bothered him greatly, and time passed drearily enough, for the two people in the next room seemed to have gone to sleep.

It was a little after seven o'clock when Bob reappeared.

He was tidied up as to his attire, and looked bright as a dollar.

Almost on his heels there came hurried footsteps up the stairs and to the door of the next room.



Wolcott! Wolcott!" spoke an excited  
e.  
Just getting up. That you Tyrell?"  
Yes. For mercy's sake, let me in—  
got news!"  
he door opened and closed. Buff got  
e to the connecting door of the two  
ns.  
We're fooled!" he heard Tyrell say.  
We're what?" demanded Wolcott's  
p tones.  
That document?"  
Well?"  
No good."  
What are you talking about? It was  
wn up the strongest a keen lawyer  
w how."  
The signatures!" blurted Tyrell.  
What about them?"  
Faded out!"  
Are you crazy?"  
Faded out—gone! I opened it to  
w to the registrar, and—the signatures  
e blank!"  
Incredible!"  
There was a lapse of silence. Then  
wkeye Bill's voice was heard:  
Governor, that don't affect my fee,  
know?"  
I have no time to bother with you,"  
pped Wolcott. "Tyrell, what trickery  
float?"  
Don't ask me, I'm—crushed!"  
Crushed? It's ruin! It was my last  
e."  
And all I've got to depend on is that  
dle of rags!"  
omething thudded, and evidently the  
concerted Tyrell had angrily thrown  
n his half of the cut-in-two bank-  
es.  
Come!" whispered Bob to Buff.  
Where?"  
Follow me."  
Bob went out into the corridor, ran  
n the first flight, reappeared with two  
a whom Buff instinctively recognized  
etectives, and approaching the door  
the next room with them, knocked  
n the panels.  
t was opened a crack cautiously. Bob  
hed it clear open.  
Ferret!"  
One surprise had unnerved Wolcott al-  
dy. This last sent him, white and  
echless, into a chair.

"Yes, Mr. Wolcott," nodded Bob,  
"these two gentlemen are here to take  
you and your colleague yonder, Tyrell, in-  
to custody for burglariously entering the  
residence of Mr. Gregory Stone and in-  
timidating him for purposes of black-  
mail."

"He'll never prosecute the case,"  
muttered Wolcott.

"Then the Traders' Mercantile Bank  
will—for fraud."

"Can they prove it?" sneered Tyrell,  
who glared at Bob as if he would like to  
strike him dead.

"I fancy!"

"There's no record."

"No, but I can prove the scheme."

"Can you?"

"I can, by producing the very ink  
with which the job was done."

"What's that!" cried Wolcott.

"The very ink, which I found in your  
coat when I drove the milk wagon for  
you to Gregory Stone's home—the very  
ink, Mr. Percy Wolcott, which I substi-  
tuted for the black ink with which you  
fancied your uncle signed that document  
this morning."

"Zounds!" gasped Wolcott—"we are  
lost!"

"I'll thank you, Mr. Tyrell," contin-  
ued Bob, "for your half of the bank-  
notes."

"They're on the table," where I threw  
them," growled Tyrell.

"They are not!" spoke Buff, pressing  
past the others and looking about.  
"Window open—fire escape! Bob, that  
fellow, Hawkeye Bill, took the alarm and  
has escaped with the banknotes!"

Buff did not lose a second. He ran  
down the stairs and out upon the street,  
peering up and down it far as he could  
see.

"Too bad! Just as Bob gave me the  
surprise of my life about that ink, just  
as we had every point in our hands—  
there he is!"

Buff hurried forward. Coming from a  
paintshop half a square distant, he saw  
his man.

Bill had on a different hat—a painter's  
half nautical canvas slouch, and under  
one arm he carried two boards tied to-  
gether.

As he hurried along, he presented the



appearance of an industrious paper hanger.

"Trying to pass the police by posing as a worker—he's bought or stolen that outfit," declared Buff. "He sees me."

Bill, glancing back, hurried his gait. Then, nearing the river, he made for its docks.

As he passed some storage sheds he halted.

The terror of Hawkeye Bill's life—a couple of policemen—were lounging a hundred yards down the wharf.

"What you want?" demanded Bill, making a stand.

"Know me?" inquired Buff, airily.

"I'm an honest mechanic——"

"Stow it, Bill. See here, you just lifted a bundle of banknotes."

"Me!"

"No good to anybody, for they're cut in half. Toss them over."

"Never saw such."

"Well, you've got my coat on, anyway."

"Take it!"

Buff was surprised at the readiness with which Bill jerked free the coat he wore.

He threw it so that it went right into Buff's face.

Only for a flashing second was Buff blinded, but that second was sufficient for crafty Bill.

He made a dash past Buff. The latter in one spring reached him.

Over the wharf went the board. Buff landed uppermost as both fell, got the advantage of a sturdy grip, and held on.

The two officers came running up. Buff bluntly told who he was.

Then he searched Hawkeye Bill. The latter grinned malevolently.

"No banknotes, eh?" he jibed.

"You had them."

"Maybe."

"Here's the fellow's pasting board," announced one of the officers, having fished it up from the water.

"That!" commented Buff—a blind that didn't work. Hello!"

He had given the boards a kick out of his path, the string came loose, and the hinged device flopped open.

"Got me!" piped Bill. "There's your truck, where I stuffed it."

There was revealed the package of banknotes, sure enough, and in two minutes more Hawkeye Bill was on his way back to a police station, and Buff was headed for the hotel they had just left.

The worst baffled men in New York city that afternoon were Wolcott and Tyrell, who, after a preliminary hearing in court, were remanded to answer the serious charges against them.

The happiest man in New York was Egbert Wadhams, assistant paying teller of the Traders' Mercantile Bank, where both halves of the cut-in-two banknotes were delivered to him, and he knew that their possession meant honor and position restored.

The proudest boy in New York city was Buff Hutchinson, ex-king of the newsboys, as he related to his veteran patron and his pupils the details of his share in the search for Nick Carter Missing Detective.

[THE END.]

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain "Nick Carter's Girl Detective; or, What Became of the Crown Jewels," by the author of "Nick Carter."

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